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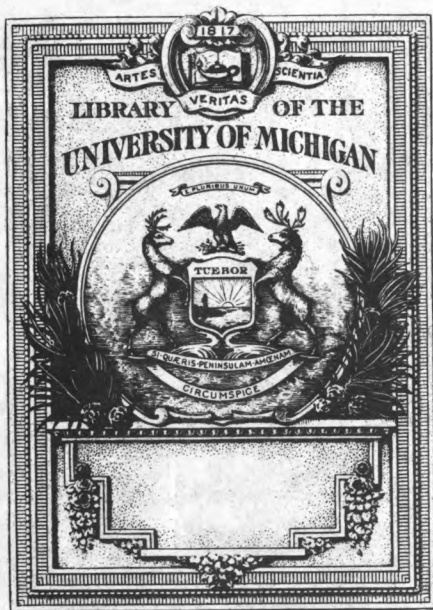
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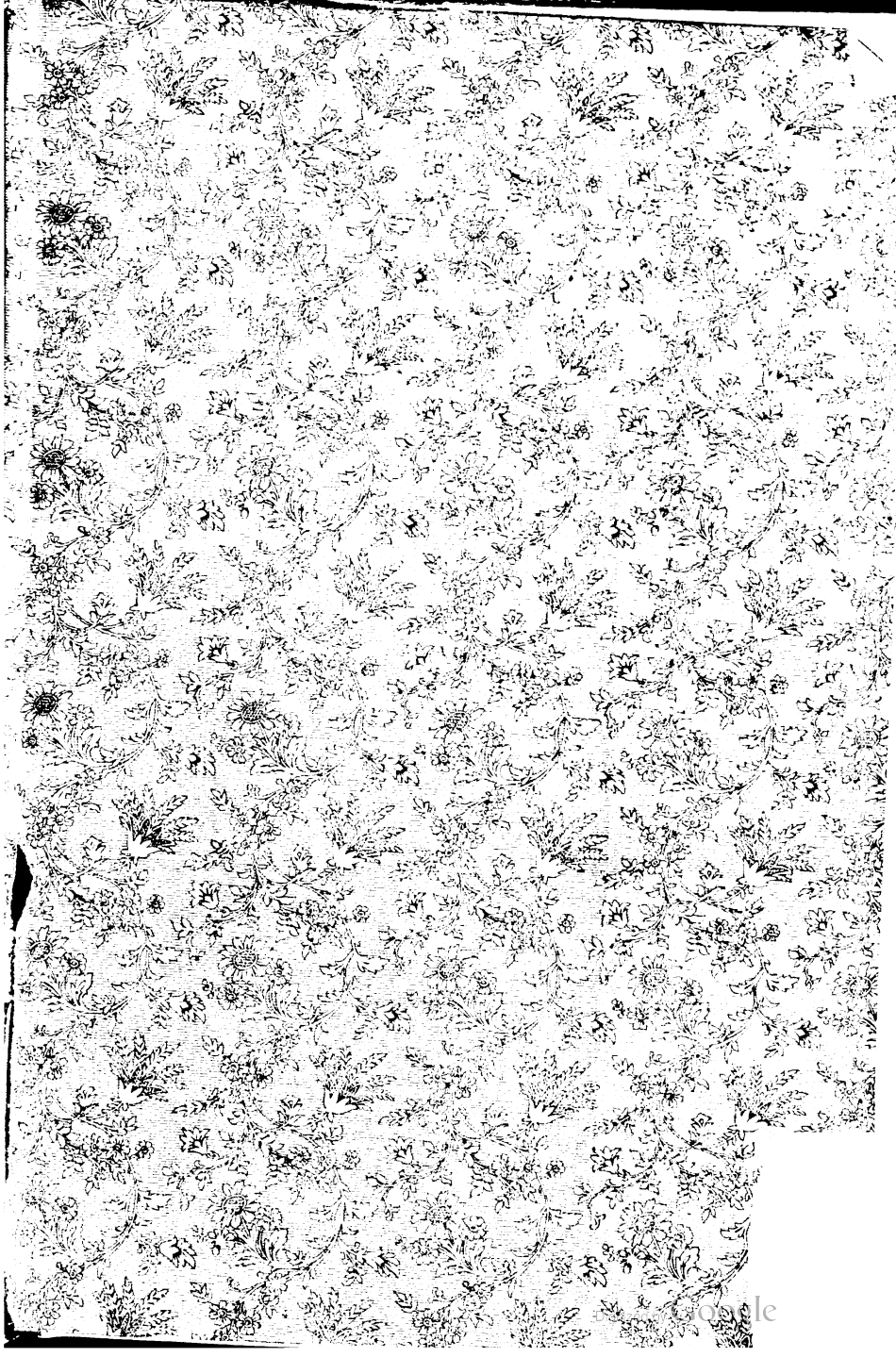
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A
CRUEL ENIGMA
PAUL BOURGET



THE GIFT OF
Robert Sadler



3/6

Reader A.

A CRUEL ENIGMA.

PAUL BOURGET.

A CRUEL ENIGMA.

Charles Joseph
BY PAUL BOURGET.

AUTHOR OF "A LOVE CRIME."

TRANSLATED WITHOUT ABRIDGMENT FROM THE 18TH FRENCH EDITION

BY JULIAN CRAY.

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PAUL BOURGET.

A POET of merit, an acute, clear-sighted critic, and an accomplished and successful novelist, M. Paul Bourget occupies an important position among the brilliant crowd of modern French *littérateurs*, upon the younger generation especially of whom he exercises an acknowledged and a constantly widening influence. Nor will this influence appear other than natural if it be borne in mind that, gifted with no mean qualifications for the task, M. Bourget has made a deep and particular study of just those problems which, to this self-conscious, introspective age of ours, are possessed of an all-absorbing interest. Complex as his nature undoubtedly is, and many-sided as its accomplishment might, to a first and superficial view, appear, he is in all his writings primarily a critic, while his criticism has, moreover, uniformly occupied itself with the same objects, with the hidden movements of the mind, that is to say, considered in their bearings upon external manifestation, with all the varied promptings which underlie the surface of conduct.

For the prosecution of such psychological studies, M. Bourget is in every needful particular well fitted. He possesses keen insight, and a remarkable power of sympathetically appreciating the play and counter-play of motives, passions, and delicate shades of feeling; while he is also endowed with that tact, subtlety, refinement, and, above all, exact lucidity of expression, by which a writer is enabled to convey his divinings unimpaired to the reader. This flexibility of sympathy, with its answering

flexibility of language, enabling to the expression alike of widely sundered and of delicately blending diversities of thought and emotion, correspond to, and are, perhaps, partly the outcome of, a richly varied life-experience. Just as M. Bourget has made himself equally at home in London and in Florence, in Paris and in Morocco, so is he equally at ease and equally successful whether he be engaged in indicating some of the consequences wrought by cosmopolitan existence in the characters of Stendhal, Tourgénéiev, and Amiel; in analysing the conceptions of modern love presented in the writings of Baudelaire and M. Alexandre Dumas; in measuring the modifications produced by science in the imaginations and diverse sensibilities of Flaubert, M. Leconte de Lisle, and M. Taine; or, finally, in living the life of his own fictitious characters, and portraying for us a Hubert or a Theresa de Sauve.

It is evident that the wielder of such exceptional powers must be obvious to peculiar dangers with which the mere dead-level narrator of outer phenomena has little or no acquaintance. To the very fulness of these powers, and to their supremely overmastering presence are due faults from which less gifted writers are shielded by their mediocrity as by a wall. It would be possible, did space and inclination serve, to point out instances of affectation both of idea and of expression in M. Bourget's writings. As in the case of some of our own premier authors—George Eliot, for instance, and Mr. George Meredith—his thought is not invariably worthy of the richness of its setting, while his analysis is occasionally pushed so far as to be superfluous, not to say absurd. The charge of "literary dandyism" brought against him by M. Jules Lemaitre is not destitute of foundation. It must be acknowledged that his subtlety borders at times on pedantry, and his refinement on conceit. Having said this, it is only fair to add that these flaws do not enter excessively into the texture of his work; indeed, they rather serve, by force of sufficiently rare and

sharply defined contrast, to throw into relief its general sterling excellence. And such imperfections should not be allowed to weigh overmuch with us in attempting to estimate the worth of our author's achievement. It is notorious that—*si parva licet componere magnis*—there are spots on the sun.

Conversant as he is with the entire gamut of human feeling, M. Bourget has in all his novels—with the single exception of the last of them, "André Cornélis"—elected to direct exclusive attention to the passion of love. His treatment of this theme is as characteristic as it is fresh. It is, further, in complete harmony with what appears to be his doctrine of life. Accuracy of vision, assisted, doubtless, by the breadth of cosmopolitan experience, has produced in him a result not uncommon with men of his calibre. In spite of his own protestation to the contrary, it has, in fact, made him a pessimist. Like Flaubert, with whom he has some affinity, and one of the most striking of whose phrases he, in the course of the following pages, unconsciously adopts, he discerns too clearly to be greatly pleased with what he sees. The pessimism of the two men was, however, arrived at by somewhat different routes. Setting aside any origins of a purely physical nature, it arose with Flaubert mainly from the inconsistency of his external surroundings with his inward ideals, and denoted simply that his objective world and his subjective world were at strife. M. Bourget's dissatisfaction flows from the unpleasing result of his analyses of the inward feelings themselves. He probes them and penetrates them throughout their complex ramifications and windings until he reaches some ultimate fact or some irreducible instinct, from which he draws the moral of an unbending necessity. And here he finds the aspirings of his imagination and the decrees of destiny at daggers drawn.

In these considerations we have a key to the proper interpretation of the present volume. "Love," its author has said

elsewhere, "has, like death, remained irreducible to human conventions. It is wild and free in spite of codes and modes. The woman who disrobes to give herself to a man, lays aside her entire social personality with her garments. For him she again becomes what he, too, becomes again for her—the natural, solitary creature to whom no protection can guarantee happiness, and from whom no decree can avert woe." These lines sum in brief the teaching of the book. Its author has, after his own fashion, made an uncompromising analysis of the passion that he undertakes to describe, and, stripping from it all the adventitious grace and mysticism and sentiment with which society is wont to shroud it, has found it to consist, in the last resort, of a single and simple fact: the physical, fleshly desire of man for woman and woman for man. Hence it is that Theresa, while receiving, and rejoicing exceedingly in, Hubert's loftier and more ideal affection, betrays it at the first opportunity for the sensual brutishness of a hard-living *roué*, and hence, too, it is that the pure-souled Hubert, even while he scorns his mistress for her treachery and loathes himself for his weakness, returns loveless and despairing to her arms.

The book is a pitiless study of the inevitable. We are made to feel that, given the particular primary conditions, the results specified could not but follow. It would almost seem that in the modern scientific conception of the universal reign of Law, and the comparatively remote possibilities of modifying its operation, we are approximating to a renewed, but far more vividly realised, enthronement of the old Greek idea of that Necessity against which the gods themselves were believed to strive in vain, and M. Bourget is too completely a man of his century not to reflect faithfully one of the most striking phases of latter-day thought. The contemplation of a fatalistic ordering of the moral world cannot be otherwise than exceptionally painful to one who, like M. Bourget, is as sensitive to moral and spiritual, as he is to physical and natural beauty. His nobler nature is wounded by the hard sequence of inevitable

law, and would fain have a deeply different moulding of circumstance, but for all that the true novelist can tell us only what he sees, and what he believes to be true, and so it comes to pass that in M. Bourget's novels, with, perhaps, a single exception, we find the eternal contrast between the "might be" and the "must be" consistently indicated. In his "L'Irréparable" and its companion tale, "Deuxième Amour," in "Crime d'Amour" and in "Cruelle Enigme," the topic which engrosses him is still the same. In all alike we are sensible of the antagonism between the cherished aspirations of the moralist and the conclusions which the psychologist finds himself unwillingly compelled to draw. And not in them only, but throughout his other writings also, we can trace the spirit-workings of the man to whom life in its entirety, no less than certain sorrowful phases of it is "a cruel enigma."

JULIAN CRAY.

DEDICATION.

TO MR. HENRY JAMES.

Allow me, my dear Henry James, to place your name on the first page of this book in memory of the time at which I was beginning to write it, and which was also the time when we became acquainted. In our conversations in England last summer, protracted sometimes at one of the tables in the hospitable Athenæum Club, sometimes beneath the shade of the trees in some vast park, sometimes on the Dover esplanade while it echoed to the tumult of the waves, we often discussed the art of novel-writing, an art which is the most modern of all because it is the most flexible, and the most capable of adaptation to the varied requirements of every temperament. We were agreed that the laws imposed upon novelists by the various

æsthetics resolve themselves ultimately into this :
to give a personal impression of life. Will
you find this impression in "A Cruel Enigma" ?
I trust so, that this work may be truly worthy
of being offered to one whose rare and subtle
talent, intelligent sympathy, and noble character,
I have been able to appreciate as reader,
fellow-worker, and friend.

P.B.

Paris, 9th February, 1885.

A CRUEL ENIGMA.

CHAPTER I.

ALL men accustomed to feel through their imaginations are well acquainted with that unique description of melancholy which is inflicted by too complete a likeness between a mother and her daughter, when the mother is fifty years old and the daughter twenty-five, and the one happens thus to exhibit the looked-for spectre of the old age of the other. How fruitful in bitterness for a lover is such a vision of the inevitable withering reserved for the beauty that he loves ! To the eye of a disinterested observer such likenesses abound in singularly suggestive reflections. Rarely, indeed, does the analogy between the features of the two faces extend to identity, and

still more rarely are the expressions completely alike. There has usually been a sort of onward march in the common temperament from one generation to the next. The predominant quality in the physiognomy has become more predominant still—a visible symbol of a development of character produced by heredity. Already too refined, the face has become still more so; sensual, it has been materialised; wilful, it has grown hard and dry.

But it is especially at the period when life has done its work, when the mother has passed her sixtieth year and the daughter her fortieth, that this gradation in likenesses becomes palpable to the student, and with it the history of the moral circumstances wherein the soul of the race of which the two beings mark two halting-places has striven. The perception of fatalities of blood is then so clear that it sometimes turns to pain. It is in such cases that the implacable, tragical action of the laws of Nature is revealed even to minds which are the most destitute of general ideas, and if this action be at all exercised against

creatures who—apart even from love—are dear to us, how it hurts us to admit it !

Although a man who had started formerly as a private soldier and has been retired as General of division, who is seventy-two years old, who has a liver complaint contracted in Africa, five wounds and the experience of fifteen campaigns, is not very prone to philosophical dreamings, it was nevertheless to impressions of this kind that General Count Alexander Scilly resigned himself one evening, on leaving the drawing-room of a small house in the Rue Vaneau, where he had left his old friend Madame Castel, and this friend's daughter, Madame Liauran, alone together. Eleven had just struck from a clock of the purest style of the Empire—a gift from Napoleon I. to Madame Castel's father—which stood on the mantelpiece in this drawing-room, and, as was his custom, the General had risen at precisely the first stroke, to go to his carriage, which had been announced.

Truth to tell, the Count had the strongest reasons in the world to be dimly and profoundly

disquieted. After the campaign of 1870, which had won him his last epaulets, but in which the ruin of his health had been completed, this man had found himself at Paris with no relations but distant cousins whom he did not like, having had grounds of complaint against them on the occasion of the succession to a common cousin. Had they not impugned the old lady's will, and made a charge of undue influence against—whom? Against him, Count Scilly, own son to the Leipsic hero! Feeling that desire, which distinguishes bachelors of all ages, to replace, by settled habits, the tranquility of the family that he lacked, the General had been led to create a home external to the rooms of the resting soldier.

Circumstances had thus made him the almost daily guest of the house in the Rue Vaneau, where the two ladies to whom he had long been attached resided. The eldest, Madame Marie Alice Castel, was the widow of his first protector, Captain Hubert Castel, who had been killed at his side in Algeria, when he, Scilly, was as yet only a plain sergeant. The second,

Madame Marie Alice Liauran, was the widow of his dearest protégé, Captain Alfred Liauran, who had been killed in Italy.

All those who have given any study to the character of an old bachelor and old soldier—a combination of two celibacies in one—will, from the mere announcement of these facts, understand the place occupied by the mother and daughter in the General's existence. Whenever he left their house, and during the whole of the time which it took his carriage to bring him home again, his one mental occupation was to recur to all the incidents in his visit. This interval was a long one, for the General lived on the Quai d'Orléans on the ground floor of an old house which had been formally bequeathed to him by his cousin. The carriage went but slowly; it was drawn by an old army horse, very aged and very quiet, gently driven by an old orderly soldier, faithful Bertrand, who would not have whipped the animal for a cask of grape-skin brandy, his favourite drink.

The carriage itself did not run easily, low and

heavy as it was—a regular dowager's chariot which the General had preserved unaltered, with the pale green leather of its lining and the dark green shade of its panels. Is there any need to add that Scilly had inherited this carriage at the same time as the house? In the ignorance of an old soldier accustomed to the roughness of a profession to which he had taken very seriously, he ingenuously considered this lumbering vehicle as the height of comfort, and seated with his hand in one of the slings, on the edge of those cushions on which his cousin used once to stretch herself voluptuously, he unceasingly saw again before him the drawing-room in the Rue Vaneau, and the two inmates of that calm retreat—oh! so calm; with its lofty closed windows, beyond which extended the princely garden reaching from the Rue Varneau to the Rue de Babylon; yes, so calm and so well known to him, Scilly, in its slightest details!

On the walls hung three large portraits, witnessing that, since the Revolution, all the men of the family had been soldiers. There was first the

grandfather, Colonel Hubert Castel, represented by the painter Gros in the dark uniform of the cuirassiers of the Empire, his head bare, his sturdy neck confined in its blue-black collar, his torso clad in its cuirass, his arms enclosed in the dark cloth of their sleeves, and his hands covered with their white rounded gauntlets. Napoleon had fallen from his throne too soon to reward, as he wished, the officer who had saved his life in the Russian campaign. Next, there was the son of this stern cavalier, a captain in the African army, painted by Delacroix in the blue tunic with its plaited folds, and the wide red trousers, tight fitting at the feet; then the portrait, painted by Flandrin, of Alfred Liauran, in the uniform of an officer of the line, such as Scilly himself had worn. On both sides were miniatures representing Colonel Castel again, but before he had attained to that rank, and also some men and women of the old régime; for Madame Castel was a Mademoiselle de Trans, of the De Transes of Provence, a very numerous and noble family belonging to the district of Aix. Colonel Castel's

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father, who had been merely the steward of Marie Alice's father, had saved the, in truth, somewhat inconsiderable property of the family during the storm of 1792, and when in 1829 Mademoiselle de Trans had wished to marry this wealthy man's grandson, who happened to be the son of a celebrated soldier, she had met with no opposition.

All Madame Castel's past, and that of her daughter, was, therefore, spread over the walls of this drawing-room, which was at once austere and homely, like all apartments which are much occupied, and occupied by persons who have cherished recollections. The furniture, which was composed of a curious mixture of objects of the First Empire, the Restoration, and the July Monarchy, certainly had no correspondence with the fortune of the two ladies, which had become very large owing to the modesty of their mode of life ; but of this furniture there was not a single piece that did not speak of someone dear both to them and to Scilly, who from childhood had found interest in everything belonging to this family. Had not his father been made a Count on the

same day that his companion-in-arms, Castel, had been made a Colonel?

And it was just this intimate acquaintance with the life of these two women which rendered the old man so strangely sensitive in respect of them. He had identified himself with them to the extent of being unable to sleep at night when he had left them visibly pre-occupied. This spare man, sunk as it were into himself, in whom everything revealed strict discipline from the stolidity of his look to the regularity of his gait, and the punctilious rigour of his dress, disclosed, when his two friends were in question, all those treasures of feeling which his mode of life had given him little opportunity to expend; and on this evening, in the month of February, 1880, he was in a state of agitation, like that of a lover who has seen his mistress's eyes bathed in tears the cause of which is unknown to him.

"What subject of grief can they have which they would not tell me?" This question passed again and again through the General's head while his carriage drove along, beaten by the

wind and lashed by the rain. It was "regular Prussian weather," as the Count's coachman expressed it; but his master never thought of pulling up the open window through which squalls were coming in every five minutes, and he constantly reverted to his question, for his poor friends had been dreadfully dull the whole evening, and the General could see them mentally just as his last glance had caught them. The mother was seated in an easy-chair at the corner of the fireplace, with her white hair, her profile which had not yet lost its pride, and her strangely-black eyes set in a face wrinkled with those long vertical wrinkles which tell of nobleness of life. The extraordinary paleness of her colourless and, as it were, bloodless complexion betrayed at all times the great sorrows of a widowhood which had found nothing to divert or console it. But that evening this paleness had appeared to the Count even more startling, as, too, had the restlessness in the physiognomy of the daughter.

Although Madame Liauran was past forty, not

one thread of silver mingled as yet with the bands of black hair crowning the faded yet not withered face, in which all her mother's features were reproduced, but with more emaciation and pain. A nervous complaint kept her always lying on her couch, which, that evening, was exactly opposite to Madame Castel's easy chair, so that the General, on leaving the drawing-room had been able to see both women at once, and to feel confusedly that on the second there was weighing a double widowhood. No, there was nothing left in this creature to enable her to support life without suffering. To Scilly, who knew in what an atmosphere of tenderness and sorrow the second Marie Alice had grown up, before herself entering an atmosphere of new troubles, this sort of intensified widowhood afforded an easy explanation of the existence in the daughter of a sensitiveness that was already keen in the mother.

But then, were there not years in which the melancholy of the two widows was enlivened or rather warded off by the presence of a child,

Alexander Hubert Liauran, who had been born a few months before the Italian war—a charming creature, somewhat too frail to suit the taste of his godfather, the General, who was fond of calling him “Mademoiselle Hubert,” and as graceful as all young people are who have been brought up only by women? In the circumstances in which his mother and grandmother found themselves, how could this boy have been anything but the whole world to them?

“If they are so downcast, it can only be on his account,” said the Count to himself; “yet there is no question of war —” for the old soldier recollected the promise which the young man had made to him to enlist at once if ever a new strife should bring Germany and France into conflict. This one condition had induced him not to dispute the frightened wish of the two women who had been desirous of keeping the son by their side. The young man, in fact, had at first been attracted by the military profession; but the mere idea of seeing their child dressed in uniform had been too stern a martyrdom

for Madame Castel and Madame Liauran, and the child had remained with them, unprovided with any career but that of loving and of being loved.

The remembrance of his godson, Hubert, awakened a fresh train of musing in the Count. His brougham had gone down the Rue du Bac, and was now advancing along the quays. A rain-splash fell on the old soldier's cheek and he closed the pane which had remained open. The sudden sensation of cold made him shrink further into the corner of his carriage and into his thoughts. That kind of backset which is produced by physical annoyance often has the strange effect of heightening the power of remembrance within us. Such was the case with the General, who suddenly began to reflect that for several weeks his godson had rarely spent the evening at the Rue Vaneau. He had not been disturbed by this, knowing that Madame Liauran was very anxious that her son should go into society. They were so much afraid lest he should weary of their narrow life.

Scilly was now compelled by a secret instinct to connect this absence with the inexplicable sadness overspreading the faces of the two women. He understood so well that all the keen forces of the grandmother's and of the mother's heart, had their supreme centre in the existence of their child ! And he pictured to himself pell-mell the thousand scenes of passionate affection which he had witnessed since the time of Hubert's birth. He remembered Madame Castel's recrudescent paleness, and Madame Liauran's deadly headaches at the slightest uneasiness in the child. He could see again the days of his education, the course of which was followed by the mother herself. How many times had he admired the young woman as, with her elbow resting on a little table, she employed her evening hours in studying the page of a Latin or Greek book, which the boy was to repeat next day ?

With a touching, infatuated tenderness such as is peculiar to certain mothers who would be pained by the slightest divorce between their own mind and their son's, Madame Liauran had

sought to associate herself hour by hour with the development of her child's intelligence. Hubert had not taken a lesson in the upper room in the little house at which his mother was not present, engaged with some piece of charitable work, such as knitting a coverlet or hemming handkerchiefs for the poor, but listening with all her attention to what the master was saying. She had pushed the divine susceptibility of her soul's jealousy so far as to be unwilling to have a private tutor. Hubert had, therefore, received instruction from different masters whom Madame Liauran had engaged on the recommendations of her confessor, the Vicar of Sainte-Clotilde, and none of them had been able to dispute with her an influence which she would share only with the grandmother.

When it was necessary that the youth should learn how to ride and fence, the poor woman, to whom an hour spent away from her son was a period of ill-dissembled anguish, had taken months and months to make up her mind. At last she had consented to fit up a room on the ground-floor as a fencing school. An old

regimental instructor, who was settled in Paris, and whom General Scilly had had under him in the service, used to come three times a week. The mother did not venture to acknowledge that the mere noise of the clashing of the swords awakened within her a dread of some accident, and caused her almost insurmountable emotion. The Count had likewise induced Madame Liauran to entrust her son to him to be taken to the riding-school; but she had done so on condition that he would not leave him for a minute, and every departure for this horse-exercise had continued to be an occasion of secret agony.

Foreign as they might be to his own character, all these shades of feeling, which had made the education of the young man a mysterious poem of foolish terror, painful felicity, and continual effusiveness, had been understood by Count Scilly, thanks to the intelligence of the most devoted affection, and he knew that Madame Castel, though outwardly more mistress of herself, was little better than her daughter. How many glances from the pale woman had he not

caught, wrapping Marie Alice Liauran and Hubert in too ardent and absolute idolatry?

The days had passed away; their child was reaching his twenty-second year, and the two widows continued to entwine and bind him with the thousand attentions by which impassioned women, whether mothers, wives, or lovers, know how to keep the object of their passion beside them. With a careful minuteness that was fruitful in intimate delight, they had taken pleasure in furnishing for Hubert the most charming bachelor's rooms that could be imagined. They had enlarged a pavilion running out from behind the house into a little garden which was itself contiguous to the immense garden in the Rue de Varenne. From her own bedroom windows Madame Liauran could see those of her son, who had thus a little independent universe to himself. The two women had had the sense to understand that they could keep Hubert altogether with themselves only by anticipating the wish for a personal existence inevitable in a man of twenty.

On the ground floor of this pavilion were two spacious rooms on a level with the garden—one containing a billiard table, and the other every requisite for fencing. It was here that Hubert received his friends, consisting of some people from the Faubourg Saint-Germain; for, although Madame Castel and Madame Liauran did not visit, they had maintained continuous relations with all those in the Faubourg who occupied themselves with works of charity. These formed a distinct society, very different from the worldly clan, and united in a mode all the closer, because its relations were very frequent, serious and personal. But certainly none of Hubert's young friends moved in an establishment comparable to that which the two women had organised on the first story of the pavilion. They who lived in the simplicity of unexpectant widows, and who would not for the world have modified anything in the antique furniture of their house, had had modern luxury and comfort suddenly revealed to them by their feelings towards Hubert.

The young man's bedroom was hung with

prettily and coquettishly fantastical Japanese stuffs, and all the furniture had come from England. Madame Castel and Madame Liauran had been charmed with some specimens which they had seen at the house of a furious Anglo-maniac and distant relation of their own, and with the caprice of love they had proposed to give themselves the pleasure of affording this original elegance to their child. Accordingly, the room, which looked towards the south and always had the sun upon it, contained a charming, triple-panelled wardrobe, a wooden wainscot and a what-not mirror over the mantle-piece, two graceful brackets, a low square bed, and arm-chairs that one could lounge in for ever—in short, it was really such a *home* of refined convenience as every rich Englishman likes to obtain. A bath-room and a smoking-room adjoined this apartment.

Although Hubert was not as yet addicted to tobacco, the two women had anticipated even this habit, and it had afforded them a pretext for fitting up a little room in quite an Oriental

fashion, with a profusion of Persian carpets and a broad divan draped with Algerian stuffs brought back by the General from his campaigns, while similar stuffs adorned ceilings and walls, upon which might be seen all the weapons which three generations of officers had left behind them. Some Egyptian sabres recalled the first campaign in which Hubert Castel had served in Buonaparte's retinue. The Captain in the African Army had been the owner of these Arab weapons, and those memorials of the Crimea bore witness to the presence of Sub-Lieutenant Liauran beneath the walls of Sebastopol.

On leaving the smoking-room you entered the study, the windows of which were double, those inside being of coloured glass, so that on dull days it was possible not to notice the aspect of the hour. The two women had endured such frightful recurrences of melancholy on gloomy afternoons, and beneath cruel skies! A large writing-table standing in the middle of the room had in front of it one of those revolving arm-chairs which allows the worker to turn round

towards the fireplace without so much as rising. A little Tronchin table presented its raised desk, if the young man took a fancy to stand as he wrote, while a couch awaited his idleness. A cottage piano stood in the corner, and a long, low bookshelf ran along the back part of the room.

Perhaps the books with which the shelves of the last-named piece of furniture were provided interpreted even better than all the other details the anxious solicitude with which Madame Castel and Madame Liauran had made every arrangement in order to remain mistresses of the son during those difficult years which intervene between the twentieth and the thirtieth. Having both, as soldiers' widows, preserved a reverence for a life of action while, at the same time, their extreme tenderness for Hubert rendered them incapable of enduring that he should face it, they had found a compromise for their consciences in the dream of a studious life for him. They ingenuously cherished a wish that he should undertake a large and long work of military

history, such as one of the De Trans family had left behind him in the eighteenth century. Was not this the best means for ensuring that he would remain a great deal at home—that is to say, with them? Accordingly, thanks to Scilly's advice, they had formed a tolerable collection of books suitable for this project. Some religious works, a small number of novels, and, alone among modern writers, the works of Lamartine completed the equipment of the shelves.

It is right to say that in that corner of the world where no journal was taken in, contemporary literature was completely unknown. The ideas of the General and of the two women were identical on this point. And the case was nearly the same in respect of the whole contemporary world as it was in respect of literature. Astonishing conversations might have been heard in that drawing-room in the Rue Vaneau, in the course of which the Count would explain to his friends that France was governed by the delegates of the secret societies, with other political theories of similar scope. The same causes always produce

the same effects. Precisely as happens in very small country towns, monotony of habit had resulted, with the two widows, in monotony of thought. Feelings were very deep and ideas very narrow in that old house the entrance gate of which was opened but rarely. On such occasions the passer-by could see, at the end of a court, a building on the pediment of which might be read a Latin motto, engraved in former times in honour of Marshal de Créquy, the first owner of the house : *Marti invicto atque indefesso*—to unconquered and indefatigable Mars. The lofty windows of the first storey and of the ground floor, the old colour of the stone, the appropriate silence of the court, all harmonised with the characters of the two residents, whose prejudices were infinite.

Madame Castel and her daughter believed in presentiments, double sight, and somnambulists. They were persuaded that the Emperor Napoleon III. had undertaken the Italian war in fulfilment of a carbonaro oath. Never would these divinely good women have bestowed their friendship upon a Protestant or an Israelite. The mere idea

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that there might be a conscientious Freethinker would have disconcerted them as though they had been told of the sanctity of a criminal. In short, even the General thought them ingenuous. But, as it sometimes happens with officers condemned to fleeting loves by their roving life and the timid feelings hidden beneath their martial appearance Scilly was not well enough acquainted with women to appreciate the reality of this ingenuousness or the depth of the ignorance of evil in which the two Marie Alices lived. He supposed that all virtuous women were similar, and he confounded all others under the term of "queans." When his liver troubled him excessively he would pronounce this word in a tone which gave grounds for suspecting some bitter deception in his past life. But who among the few people that he met at the house of "his two saints," as he called Madame Castel and her daughter, dreamed of troubling themselves about whether he had been deceived by some garrison adventuress or not?

Still lulled by the rolling of his carriage, the

General continued to resign himself to the memory-crisis through which he had been passing since his departure from the Rue Vaneau, and which had caused him to review, in a quarter of an hour, the entire existence of his friends. Other faces also were evoked around these two forms, those, for instance, of Madame de Trans, Madame Castel's first cousin, who lived in the country for part of the year, and who used to come with her three daughters, Yolande, Yseult and Ysabeau, to spend the winter at Paris. These four ladies used to take up their abode in apartments in the Rue de Monsieur, and their Parisian life consisted in hearing low mass at seven o'clock in the morning in the private chapel of a convent situated in the Rue de La Barouillère, in visiting other convents, or in busying themselves in workrooms during the afternoon. They went to bed at about half-past eight, after dining at noon and supping at six.

Twice a week "those De Trans ladies," as the General called them, spent the evening with their cousins. On these occasions they returned

to the Rue de Monsieur at ten o'clock, and their servant used to come for them with a parcel containing their pattens and with a lantern that they might cross the courtyard of Madame Castel's house without danger. The Countess de Trans and her three daughters had the sunburnt and freckled faces of peasant women, dresses home-made by seamstresses chosen for them by the nuns, parsimonious tastes written in the meanness of their whole existence, and—a detail revealing their native aristocracy—charming hands and delicious feet which could not be disgraced by the ready-made boots purchased in a pious establishment in the Rue de Sèvres.

The most singular contrast existed between these four women and George Liauran, another cousin on the side of the second Marie Alice. He represented all the fashions in the drawing-room in the Rue Vaneau. He was a man of forty-five who had been launched into wealthy society with a fortune that had at first been a moderate one but had increased by clever speculations on the Bourse. He had his

rooms in his club, where he used to breakfast, and every evening a cover was laid for him in one of the houses in which he was a familiar guest. He was small, thin, and very brown. Whether or not he maintained the youth of his pointed beard and very short hair by the artifice of a dye, was a question that had long been debated among the three Demoiselles de Trans, who were stupefied at the sight of George's superior appearance, the varnished soles of his dress-shoes, the embroidered clocks of his silk socks, the chased gold studs in his cuffs, the single pearl in his shirt front, by the slightest knick-knacks, in fact, belonging to this man with the shrewd lively eyes, whose toilet represented to them a life of thrilling prodigality. It was agreed among them that he exercised a fatal influence over Hubert. ✓

Such was doubtless not Madame Liauran's opinion, for she had desired George to act as a chaperon to the young man in the life of the world, when she wished her son to cultivate their family relations. The noble woman

rewarded her cousin's lengthened attention by this mark of confidence. He had come to the quiet house very regularly for years, whether it was that the security of this affection was pleasing to him amid the falsities of Parisian society, or that he had long conceived a secret adoration for Marie Alice Liauran, such as the purest women sometimes unconsciously inspire in misanthropes—for George had that shade of pessimism which is to be met with in nearly all club-livers. The nature of the character of this man, who was always inclined to believe the worst of everything, was the object of an astonishment on the part of the General that custom had failed to allay; but on this evening he omitted to reflect upon it. The recollection of George only served to heighten that of Hubert still more.

Irresistibly the worthy man came to recognise the obviousness of the fact that his two friends could not be so cruelly downcast except on account of their child. Yes; but why? This point of interrogation, which summed up the

whole of his reverie, was more present than ever to the Count's mind as his dowager equipage stopped before his house. Another carriage was standing on the other side of the gateway, and Scilly thought that in it he could recognise the little brougham which Madame Liauran had given to her son.

"Is that you, John?" he cried to the coachman through the rain.

"The Count, sir?" replied a voice which Scilly was startled to recognise.

"Hubert is waiting for me within," he said to himself; and he crossed the threshold of the door a prey to curiosity such as he had not experienced for years.

CHAPTER II.

NEVERTHELESS, in spite of his curiosity, the General did not make a gesture the quicker. The habit of military minuteness was too strong with him to be vanquished by any emotion. He himself put his stick into the stand, drew off his furred gloves one after the other and laid them on the table in the antechamber beside his hat, which was carefully placed on its side. His servant took off his overcoat with the same slowness. Not until then did he enter the apartment where, as his servant had just told him, the young man had been awaiting him for half-an-hour.

It was a cheerless looking room, and one which revealed the simplicity of a life reduced to its strictest wants. Oak shelves overladen with books, the mere appearance of which indicated official publications, ran along two sides. Some

maps and a few weapon-trophies adorned the rest. A writing-table placed in the centre of the apartment displayed papers classified in groups—notes for the great work which the Count had been preparing for an indefinite time on the reorganisation of the army. Two lustring sleeves, methodically folded, lay among the squares and rulers; a bust of Marshal Bugeaud adorned the fireplace, which was furnished with a grate, in which a coke fire was dying out.

The tile-paved floor was tinted red, and the carpet scarcely extended beyond the legs of the table which rested upon them. On the table stood a bright copper lamp, which was lighted at the present moment, and the green cardboard shade threw the light upon the face of young Liauran, who was seated beside it in the straw arm-chair, and was looking at the fire, with his chin resting on his hand. He was so absorbed in his reverie that he appeared to have heard neither the rolling of the carriage-wheels nor the General's entrance into the apartment. Never, moreover, had the latter been so struck as he was

just then with the astonishing likeness presented by the physiognomy of the child with that of the two women by whom he had been brought up.

If Madame Liauran appeared more frail than her mother, and less capable of coping with the bitterness of life, this fragility was still more exaggerated in Hubert. The thin cloth of his dress-coat—for he was in evening dress, with a white nosegay in his button-hole—allowed the outlines of his slender shoulders to be seen. The fingers extended across his temple were as delicate as a woman's. The paleness of his complexion, which, owing to the extreme regularity of his life, was usually tinged with pink, betrayed, in this hour of sadness, the depth of vibration awakened by all emotion in this too delicate organism. There were deep, nacreous circles round his handsome black eyes; but, at the same time, a touch of pride in the line of the nobly-cut forehead and almost perfectly straight nose, the curve of the lips with its slender dark moustache, the set of the chin marked with a manly dimple, and other tokens still, such as the

bar of the knitted eyebrows, betrayed the heredity of a race of action in the over-petted child of two lovely women.

If the General had been as good a connoisseur in painting as he was skilled in arms, this face would certainly have reminded him of those portraits of young princes painted by Van Dyck, in which the almost morbid delicacy of an ancient race is blended with the obstinate pride of heroic blood. After pausing for a few seconds in contemplation, the General walked towards the table. Hubert raised the charming head which his brown ringlets, disordered as they were at that moment, rendered completely similar to the portraits executed by the painter of Charles I.; he saw his godfather and rose to greet him. He had a slight and well-made figure, and merely in the graceful fashion in which he held out his hand could be traced the lengthened watchfulness of maternal eyes. Are not our manners the indestructible work of the looks which have followed us and judged us during our childhood?

“And so you have come to speak to me on

very serious business," said the General, going straight to the point. "I suspected as much," he added. "I left your mother and your grandmother more melancholy than I had ever seen them since the Italian war. Why were you not with them this evening? If you do not make those two women happy, Hubert, you are cruelly ungrateful, for they would give their lives for your happiness. And now, what is going on?"

The General, in uttering these words, had pursued aloud the thoughts which had been tormenting him during the drive home from the Rue Vaneau. He could see the young man's features changing visibly as he spoke. It was one of the hereditary fatalities in the temperament of this too dearly loved child that the sound of a harsh voice always gave him a painful little spasm of the heart; but, no doubt, to the harshness of Count Scilly's accents there was added the harshness of the meaning of his words. They brutally laid bare a too sensitive wound. Hubert sat down as though crushed; then he replied in a voice which, naturally somewhat clouded, was

at this moment more muffled than usual. He did not even attempt to deny that he was the cause of the sorrow on the part of the two women.

"Do not question me, godfather. I give you my word of honour that I am not guilty, only I cannot explain to you the misunderstanding which makes me a subject of grief to them. I cannot help it. I have gone out oftener than usual, and that is my only crime."

"You are not telling me the whole truth," replied Scilly, softened, in spite of his anger, by the young man's evident grief. "Your mother and your grandmother are too fond of keeping you tied to their apron strings, and I have always thought so. You would have been brought up more hardily if I had been your father. Women do not understand how to train a man. But have they not been urging you for the last two years to go into society? It is not your going out, therefore, that grieves them, but your motive for doing so."

As he uttered these words, which he considered very clever, the Count looked at his godson

through the smoke from a little brier pipe which he had just lighted, a mechanical custom sufficiently explaining the acrid atmosphere with which the room was saturated. He saw Hubert's cheeks colour with a sudden inflow of blood, which to a more perspicacious observer would have been an undeniable confession. Only an allusion or the dread of an allusion to a woman whom he loves, has the power to disturb a young man of such evident purity as Hubert was. After a few moments of this sudden emotion, he replied :

"I declare to you, godfather, that there is nothing in my conduct of which I should be ashamed. It is the first time that neither my mother nor my grandmother has understood me—but I shall not yield to them on the point in dispute. They are unjust about it, frightfully unjust," he continued, rising and taking a few steps.

This time his face was no longer expressive of submission, but of the indomitable pride which military heredity had infused into his blood. He

did not give the General time to notice his words, which in the mouth of a son, usually only too submissive, disclosed an extraordinary intensity of passion. He contracted his eyebrows, shook his head as though to drive away some tormenting thought, and, once more master of himself, went on :

"I have not come here to complain to you, godfather; you would give me a bad reception, and you would not be wrong. I have to ask a service of you, a great service. But I would wish all that I am going to confide to you to remain between ourselves."

"I never enter into such engagements," said the Count. "A man has not always the right to be silent," he added. "All that I can promise you is to keep your secret if my affection for you know whom, does not make it a duty that I should speak. Come, now, decide for yourself."

"Be it so," rejoined the young man, after a silence, during which he had, no doubt, judged of the situation in which he found himself; "you

will do as you please. What I have to say to you is comprised in a short sentence. God-father, can you lend me three thousand francs?"

This question was so unexpected by the Count that it forthwith changed the current of his thoughts. Since the beginning of the conversation he had been trying to guess the young man's secret, which was also the secret of his two friends, and he had necessarily thought that some intrigue was in question. To tell the truth, he did not consider this very shocking. Though very devout, Scilly had remained too essentially a soldier not to have most indulgent theories respecting love. Military life leads those who follow it to a simplification of thought which causes them to admit all facts, whatever they may be, in their verity. A "quean" in Scilly's eyes was a necessary malady with a young man. It was enough if the malady did not last too long, and if the young man came out of it with tolerable impunity. Now he had suddenly a misgiving that was more alarming to him, for,

owing to his regimental experience, he considered cards much more dangerous than women.

"You have been gambling?" he said abruptly.

"No, godfather," replied the young man. "I have merely spent more than my allowance for the last few months; I have debts to settle, and," he added, "I am leaving for England the day after to-morrow."

"And your mother knows of this journey?"

"Undoubtedly; I am going to spend a fortnight in London with my friend, Emmanuel Deroy, of the Embassy, whom you know."

"If your mother lets you go," returned the old man, continuing the logical pursuit of his inquiry, "it is because your conduct in Paris is grieving her cruelly. Answer me frankly—You have a mistress?"

"No," replied Hubert, with a fresh rush of purple across his cheeks. "I have no mistress."

"If it is neither the Queen of Spades nor the Queen of Hearts," said the General, who did not doubt his godson's veracity for a moment—he

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knew him to be incapable of a falsehood—"will you do me the honour of telling me what has become of the five hundred francs a month, a colonel's pay, which your mother gives you for pocket-money?"

"Ah! godfather," returned the young man, visibly relieved; "you do not know the requirements of a life in society. Why, to-day I gave a dinner to three friends at the Café Anglais; that came to very nearly a hundred and fifty francs. I have sent several bouquets, hired carriages to go into the country, and given a few keepsakes. The five bank-notes are so soon at an end! In short, I repeat, I have debts that I want to pay, I have to meet the expenses of my journey, and I do not want to apply to my mother or my grandmother just now. They do not know what a young man's life in Paris is like; I do not want to add a second misunderstanding to the first. With our present relations what they are they would see faults where there have been only inevitable necessities. And, then, I am physically unable to endure a scene with my mother."

"And if I refuse?" Scilly asked.

"I shall apply elsewhere," said Alexander Hubert; "it will be terribly painful to me, but I shall do so."

There was silence between the two men. The whole story was darkening again in the General's eyes, like the smoke which he was sending from his pipe in methodical puffs. But what he did see clearly was the definitive nature of Hubert's resolve, whatever its secret cause might be. To refuse him would be perhaps to send him to a money-lender, or at all events to force him to take some step wounding to his pride. On the other hand, to advance this sum to his godson was to acquire a right to follow out more closely the mystery which lay at the bottom of his excitement, as well as behind the melancholy of the two women. And then, when all is told, the Count loved Hubert with an affection that bordered closely on weakness. If he had been deeply moved by Madame Liauran's and Madame Castel's dull despair, he was now completely upset by the visible anguish written on the face

of this child, who was, in his thoughts, an adopted son as dear as any real son could have been.

"My dear fellow," he said at last, taking Hubert's hand, and in a tone of voice giving no further token of the harshness which had marked the beginning of their conversation, "I think too highly of you to believe that you would associate me in any action that could displease your mother. I will do what you wish, but on one condition——"

Hubert's eyes betrayed fresh anxiety.

"It is merely to fix the date on which you expect to repay me the money. I want to oblige you," continued the old soldier, "but it would not be worthy of you to borrow a sum that you believed yourself unable to pay back again, nor of me to lend myself to a calculation of the kind. Will you come back here to-morrow afternoon? You will bring me an account of what you can spare from your allowance every month. Ah! it will not do to offer any more bouquets, or dinners at the Café Anglais, or keepsakes. But, then, have

you not lived for a long time past without these foolish expenses ? ”

This little speech, in which the spirit of order that was essential to the General, his goodness of heart, and his taste for regularity of life were blended in equal proportion, moved Hubert so deeply that he pressed his godfather's fingers without replying, as though crushed by emotions which he had left unexpressed. He suspected that while this interview was taking place at the Quai d' Orleans, the evening was being lengthened out at the house in the Rue Vaneau, and that the two beings whom he loved so deeply were commenting on his absence. He himself suffered from the pain that he was causing, as though a mysterious thread linked him to those two women seated beside their lonely hearth.

And, indeed, the General once gone, the “two saints” had remained silent for a long time in the quiet little drawing-room. Nothing of all the tumult of Parisian life reached them but a vast, confused murmuring analogous to that of the sea when heard a long way off. The seclusion of

this retired abode, with the hum of life outside, was a symbol of what had so long been the destiny of Madame Castel and her daughter. Marie Alice Liauran, lying on her couch, and looking very slight in her black attire, seemed to be listening to this hum, or to her thoughts, for she had relinquished the work with which she had been engaged; while her mother, seated in her easy-chair, and also in black, continued to ply her tortoiseshell crochet-hook, sometimes raising her eyes towards her daughter with a look wherein a twofold anxiety might be read. She also experienced the sensation felt by her daughter, on account both of Hubert and of this daughter, whose almost morbid sensitiveness she knew. It was not she, however, who first broke the silence, but Madame Liauran, who suddenly, and as though pursuing her reverie aloud, began to lament:

“What renders my pain still more intolerable is that he sees the wound which he has dealt my heart, and that he is not to be stopped by it—he who, from childhood until within the last six

months, could never encounter a shadow in my look or a wrinkle on my forehead without a change of countenance. That is what convinces me of the depth of his passion for this woman. What a passion and what a woman!"

"Do not become excited," said Madame Castel, rising and kneeling in front of her daughter's couch. "You are in a fever," she said, taking her hand. Then, in a low voice, and as though probing her consciousness to the bottom, she went on: "Alas! my child, you are jealous of your son, as I have been jealous of you. I have spent so many days—I can tell you this now—in loving your husband ——"

"Ah! mother," replied Madame Liauran, "that is not the same kind of grief. I did not degrade myself in giving part of my heart to the man whom you had chosen, while you know that cousin George has told us of this Madame de Sauve, and of her education by that unworthy mother, and of her reputation since she has been married, and of the husband who can suffer his wife to have a drawing-room in which the conversation

is more than free, and of the father, the old prefect, who, on being left a widower, brought up his daughter helter-skelter with his mistresses. I confess, mamma, that if there is egotism in maternal love, I have had that egotism ; I have been grieved by anticipation at the thought that Hubert would marry, and that he would continue his life apart from mine. But I blamed myself greatly for feeling in that way,—whereas now he has been taken from me, and taken from me only to be disgraced !”

For some minutes longer she prolonged this violent lamentation, wherein was revealed that kind of passionate frenzy which had caused all the keen forces of her heart to be concentrated about her son. It was not only the mother that suffered in her, it was the pious mother to whom human faults were abominable crimes ; it was the sad and isolated mother upon whom the rivalry of a young, rich, and elegant woman inflicted secret humiliation ; in fine, her heart was bleeding at every pore. The sight of this suffering, however, wounded Madame Castel so cruelly, and

her eyes expressed such sorrowful pity, that Marie Alice broke off her complaint. She leaned over on her couch, laid a kiss upon those poor eyes, so like her own, and said :

“Forgive me, mamma ; but to whom should I tell my trouble if not to you ? And then—would you not see it ? Hubert is not coming in,” she added, looking at the clock, the pendulum of which continued to move quietly to and fro. “Do you not think that I ought to have opposed this journey to England ?”

“No, my child ; if he is going to pay a visit to his friend, why should you exercise your authority in vain ? And if he were going from any other motive, he would not obey you. Remember that he is twenty-two years old, and that he is a man.”

“I am growing foolish, mother ; this journey was settled a long time ago—I have seen Emmanuel’s letters ; but, when I am grieved, I can no longer reason, I can see nothing but my sorrow, and it obstructs all my thoughts— Ah ! how unhappy I am !”

CHAPTER III.

IF any proof of the thorough many-sidedness of our nature were required, it might be found in that law which is a customary object of indignation with moralists, and which ordains that the sight of the sorrow of our most loved ones cannot, at certain times, prevent us from being happy. Our feelings seem to maintain a sort of life and death struggle against one another in our hearts. Intensity of existence in anyone among them, though it be but momentary, is only to be obtained at the cost of weakening all the rest. It is certain that Hubert loved his two mothers—as he always called the two women who had brought him up—to distraction. It is certain that he had guessed that for many days they had been holding conversations together analogous to that of the evening on which he had borrowed from his godfather the three thousand francs

which he required for settling his debts and meeting the cost of his journey.

And yet, on the second day after that evening, when he found himself in the train which was taking him to Boulogne, it was impossible for him not to feel his soul steeped, as it were, in divine bliss. He did not ask himself whether Count Scilly would or would not speak of the step that he had taken. He put aside the apprehension of this just as he drove away the recollection of Madame Liauran's eyes at the moment of his departure, and just as he stifled all the scruples that might be suggested by his uncompromising piety.

If he had not absolutely lied to his mother in telling her that he was going to join his friend Emmanuel Deroy in London, he had nevertheless deceived this jealous mother by concealing from her that he would meet Madame de Sauve at Folkestone. Now, Madame de Sauve was not free. Madame de Sauve was married, and in the eyes of a young man brought up as the pious Hubert had been, to love a married woman constituted an inexpiable fault. Hubert must and

did believe himself in a condition of mortal sin. His Catholicism, which was not merely a religion of fashion and posture, left him in no doubt on this point. But religion, family obligations of truthfulness, fears for the future, all these phantoms of conscience appeared to him—conditioned only as phantoms, vain, powerless images, vanishing before the living evocation of the beauty of the woman who, five months before had entered into his heart to renew all within it, the woman whom he loved and by whom he knew himself to be loved.

Hubert had told the truth, in that he was not Madame de Sauve's lover in that sense of entire and physical possession in which the term is understood in our language. She had never belonged to him, and it was the first time that he was going to be really alone with her, in that solitude of a foreign land which is the secret dream of everyone who loves.

While the train was steaming at full speed through plains alternately ribbed with hills, intersected with watercourses, and bristling with

bare trees, the young man was absorbed in telling the rosary of his recollections. The charm of the hours that were gone was rendered still dearer to him by the expectation of some immense and undefined happiness.

Although Madame Liauran's son was twenty-two years of age, the manner of his education had kept him in that state of purity so rare among the young men of Paris, who, for the most part, have exhausted pleasure before they have had so much as a suspicion of love. But a fact of which the young fellow was not aware was that it had been this very purity which had acted more powerfully than the most accomplished libertinism could have done upon the romantic imagination of the woman whose profile was passing to and fro before his gaze with the motion of the carriage, and showing itself alternately against woods, hills and dunes. How many images does a passing train thus bear along, and with them how many destinies rushing towards weal or woe in the distant and the unknown!

Sum
analysis

It was at the beginning of the month of October, in the preceding year, that Hubert had seen Madame de Sauve for the first time. On account of Madame Liauran's health, which rendered the shortest journey dangerous to her, the two women never left Paris; but the young man sometimes went during the summer or autumn to spend three or four days in some country house. He was coming back from one of these visits in company with his cousin George, when, getting into a carriage at a station on the same northern line along which he was now travelling, he had met the young lady with her husband. The De Sauves were acquainted with George, and thus it was that Alexander Hubert had been introduced.

Monsieur de Sauve was a man of about forty-five years of age, very tall and strong, with a face that was already too red, and with traces of wear and tear which were discernible through his vigour, and the explanation of which might be found, merely by listening to his conversation, in his mode of regarding life. Existence to him

was self-lavishment, and he carried out this programme in all directions. Head of a ministerial cabinet in 1869, thrown after the war into the campaign of Bonapartist propaganda, a deputy since then, and always re-elected, but an active deputy, and one who bribed his electors, he had at the same time launched forth more and more freely into society. He had a *salon*, gave dinners, occupied himself with sport, and still found sufficient leisure to interest himself competently and successfully in financial enterprises. Add to this that before his marriage he had had much experience of ballet dancers, green-rooms of small theatres, and private supper-rooms.

There are temperaments of this kind which nature makes into machines at a great outlay, and consequently with great returns. Everything in André de Sauve revealed a taste for what is ample and powerful, from the construction of his great body to his style of dress, or to the gesture with which he would take a long black cigar from his case to smoke it. Hubert well remembered how this man, with his hairy hands

and ears, his large feet and his dragon's mien, had inspired him with that description of physical repulsion which we all endure on meeting with a physiology precisely contrary to our own.

Are there not respirations, circulations of blood, plays of muscle which are hostile to us, thanks, probably, to that indefinable instinct of life which impels two animals of different species to rend each other as soon as they come face to face? Truth to tell, the antipathy of the delicate Hubert was capable of being more simply explained on the ground of an unconscious and sudden jealousy of Madame de Sauve's husband; for Theresa, as her husband familiarly called her, had immediately exercised a sort of irresistible attraction upon the young man. In his childhood he had often turned over a portfolio of engravings brought back from Italy by his illustrious grandfather, who had served under Bonaparte, and at the first glance that fell upon this woman, he could not help recalling the heads drawn by the masters of the Lombardic school, so striking was the resemblance between

her face and those of the familiar Herodias and Madonnas of Luini and his pupils.

There was the same full, broad forehead, the same large eyes charged with somewhat heavy eyelids, the same delicious oval at the lower part of the cheek terminating in an almost square chin, the same sinuosity of lips, the same delightful union of eyebrow to the rising of the nose, and over all these charming features, a suffusion, as it were, of gentleness, grace, and mystery. Madame de Sauve had further, the vigorous neck and broad shoulders of the women of the Lombardic school, as well as all the other tokens of a race at once refined and strong, with a slender waist and the hands and feet of a child. What marked her out from this traditional type was the colour of her hair, which was not red and gold but very black, and of her eyes, the mingled grey of which bordered upon green. The amber paleness of her complexion, as well as the languishing listlessness of all her movements, completed the singular character of her beauty.

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In the presence of this creature, it was impossible not to think of some portrait of past times, although she breathed youth with the purple of her mouth and the living fluid of her eyes, and although she was dressed in the fashion of the day, and wore a jacket fitting close to her figure. The skirt of her dress, made of an English material of a grey shade, her feet cased in laced boots, her little man's collar, her straight cravat, fastened with a diamond horseshoe pin, her Swede gloves, and her round hat, scarcely suggested the toilet of princesses of the sixteenth century; and yet she presented to the eye a finished model of Milanese beauty, even in this costume of Parisian elegance. By what mystery?

She was the daughter of Madame Lussac, *née* Bressuire, whose relations had not left the Rue Saint-Honoré for three generations, and of Adolphus Lussac, Prefect under the Empire, who had come from Auvergne in Monsieur Rouher's train. The chronicle of the drawing-rooms would have answered the question by recalling the Parisian career of the handsome Count

Branciforte, somewhere about the year 1858, his greenish-grey eyes, his dead-white complexion, his attentions to Madame Lussac, and his sudden disappearance from surroundings in which for months and months he had always lived. But Hubert was never to have these particulars. By education and by nature he belonged to the race of those who accept life's official gifts and ignore their deep-lying causes, their thorough animality, and their tragic lining—a happy race, for to them belongs the enjoyment of the flower of things, but a race devoted beforehand to catastrophes, for only a clear view of the real will admit of any manipulation of it.

No; what Hubert Liauran remembered of this first interview did not consist of questions concerning the singularity of Madame de Sauve's charm. Neither had he examined himself as to the shade of character that might be indicated by the movements of the woman. Instead of studying her face he had enjoyed it as a child will relish the freshness of the atmosphere, with

a sort of unconscious delight. The complete absence of irony which distinguished Theresa, and which might be noted in her gentle smile, her calm gaze, her smooth voice, and her tranquil gestures, had instantly been sweet to him. He had not felt in her presence those pangs of painful timidity which the incisive glance of most Parisian ladies inflicts upon all young men.

During the journey which they had made together, while De Sauve and George Liauran were speaking of a law concerning religious congregations, the tenour of which was at that time exciting every party, he had sat opposite to her, and had been able to talk to her softly and, without knowing why, with intimacy. He who was usually silent about himself, with a vague idea that the almost insane excitability of his being made him a unique exception, had opened his mind to this woman of twenty-five, whom he had not known for half-an-hour, more than he had ever done to people with whom he dined every fortnight.

In answer to a question from Theresa about

his travels in the summer, he had naturally, as it were, spoken of his mother and her complaint, then of his grandmother, and then of their common life. He had given this stranger a glimpse of the secret retreat in the house in the Rue Vaneau, not indeed without remorse ; but the remorse had been later, when he was no longer within the range of her glances, and had come less from a feeling of outraged modesty than from a fear of having been displeasing to her. How captivating, in truth, were those gentle glances. There emanated from them an inexpressible caress, and when they settled upon your eyes, full in your face, the resultant sensation was like that of a tender touch, and bordered upon physical voluptuousness.

Days afterwards Hubert still remembered the species of intoxicating comfort which he had experienced in this first chat merely through feeling himself looked at in this way, and this comfort had only increased in succeeding interviews, until it had almost immediately become a real necessity for him, like breathing or sleeping.

When leaving the carriage she had told him that she was at home every Thursday, and he had soon learnt the way to the house in the Boulevard Haussmann, where she lived. In what recess of his heart had he found the energy for paying this visit, which fell on the next day but one after their meeting? Almost immediately, she had asked him to dinner. He remembered so vividly the childish pleasure which he took in reading and re-reading the insignificant note of invitation, in inhaling its slight perfume, and in following the details of the letters of his name, written by the hand of Theresa. It was a handwriting which, from the abundance of little, useless flourishes, presented a peculiarly light and fantastic appearance, in which a graphologist would have been prepared to read the sign of a romantic nature; but, at the same time, the bold fashion in which the lines were struck and the firmness of the down-strokes, where the pen pressed somewhat liberally, denoted a willingly practical and almost material mode of life.

Hubert did not reason so much as this; but,

from the first note, every letter that he received in the same handwriting became to him a person whom he would have recognised among thousands of others. With what happiness had he dressed to go to that dinner, telling himself that he was about to see Madame de Sauve during long hours, hours which, reckoned in advance, appeared infinite to him! He had felt a somewhat angry astonishment when his mother, at the moment that he was taking leave of her, had uttered a critical observation on the familiarity that was customary in society now-a-days. Then, separated though he was by months from those events, he was able, thanks to the special imagination with which, like all very sensitive creatures, he was endowed, to recall the exact shade of emotion which had been caused him by the dinner and the evening, the demeanour of the guests and that of Theresa. It is according as we possess a greater or smaller power of imagining past pains and pleasures anew that we are beings capable of cold calculation, or slaves to our sentimental life. Alas! all Hubert's faculties conspired to rivet

round his heart the bruising chain of memories that were too dear.

Theresa wore, that first evening, a dress of black lace with pink knots, and, for her only ornament, a heavy bracelet of massive gold on one wrist. Her dress was not low enough to shock the young man, whose modesty was of virginal susceptibility on this point. There were some persons in the drawing-room, not one of whom, with the exception of George Liauran, was known to him. They were, for the most part, men celebrated by different titles in the society more particularly denominated Parisian by those journals which pique themselves on following the fashion. Hubert's first sensation had been a slight shock, owing merely to the fact that some of these men presented to the malevolent observer several of the little toilet heresies familiar to the more fastidious if they have gone too late into society. Such is a coat of antiquated cut, a shirt-collar badly made and worse bleached, or a neck-tie of a white that borders upon blue, and tied by an unskilful hand.

These trifles inevitably appeared signs of a touch of Bohemianism—the word in which correct people confound all social irregularities—in the eyes of a young man accustomed to live under the continuous superintendence of two women of rare education, who had sought to make him something irreproachable. But these small signs of unsatisfactory dress had rendered Theresa's finished distinction still more graceful in his eyes, just as, to him, the sometimes cynical freedom of the talk uttered at table had imparted a charming significance to the silence of the mistress of the house. Madame Liauran had not been mistaken when she affirmed that there was very daring conversation at the house of the De Sauves.

The evening that Hubert dined there for the first time a divorce suit was discussed during the first half-hour, and a great lawyer gave some unpublished details of the case—the abominable character of a politician who had been arrested in the Champs Elysées, the two mistresses of another politician and their rivalry—but all related, as

things are related only at Paris, with those hints which admit the telling of everything. Many allusions escaped Hubert, and he was accordingly less shocked by such narrations than by other speeches bearing upon ideas, such as the following paradox, started by one of the most famous novelists of the day.

"Ah! divorce! divorce!" said this man, whose renown as a daring realist had crossed the threshold even of the house in the Rue Vaneau, "it has some good in it; but it is too simple a solution for a very complicated problem. Here, as elsewhere, catholicism has perverted all our ideas. The characteristic of advanced societies is the production of many men of very different kinds, and the problem consists in constructing an equally large number of moralists. For my part, I would have the law recognise marriages in five, ten, twenty categories, according to the sensitiveness of the parties concerned. Thus we should have life-unions intended for persons of aristocratic scrupulosity; for persons of less refined consciences, we should establish contracts

with facilities for one, two or three divorces ; for persons inferior still, we should have temporary connections for five years, three years, one year."

"People would marry just as they grant a lease," it was jestingly observed.

"Why not?" continued the other ; "the age boasts of being a revolutionary one, and it has never ventured upon what the pettiest legislator of antiquity undertook without hesitation—interference with morals."

"I see what you mean," replied André de Sauve ; "you would assimilate marriages with funerals—first, second, or third class——."

None of the guests who were amused by this tirade and the reply, amid the brightness of the crystal, the dresses of the women, the pyramids of fruit and the clusters of flowers, suspected the indignation which such talk aroused in Hubert. Who would notice the silent and modest youth at one end of the table? He himself, however, felt wounded to the very soul in the inmost convictions of his childhood and his youth, and

he glanced by stealth at Theresa. She did not utter fifty words during this dinner. She seemed to have wandered in thought far away from the conversation which she was supposed to control, and, as though accustomed to this absence of mind, no one sought to interrupt her reverie. She used to pass whole hours in this way, absorbed in herself. Her pale complexion became warmer; the brilliancy of her eyes was, so to speak, turned within; and her teeth appeared small and close through her half-opened lips. What was she thinking of at minutes such as these, and by what secret magic were these same minutes those which acted most strongly upon the imagination of those who were sensible of her charm?

A physiologist would doubtless have attributed these sudden torpors to passages of nervous emotion, were they not the token of a sensual aberration against which the poor creature struggled with all her strength. Hubert had seen in the silence of that evening only a delicate woman's disapprobation of the talk of her friends

and her husband, and he had found it a supreme pleasure to go up to her and talk to her on leaving the dinner-table, at which his dearest beliefs had been wounded. He had seated himself beneath the gaze of her eyes, now limpid once more, in one of the corners of the drawing-room—an apartment furnished completely in the modern style, and which, with its opulence that made it like a little museum, its plushes, its ancient stuffs, and its Japanese trinkets, contrasted with the severe apartments in the Rue Vaneau as absolutely as the lives of Madame Castel and Madame Liauran could contrast with the life of Madame de Sauve.

Instead of recognising this evident difference and making it a starting-point for studying the newness of the world in which he found himself, Hubert gave himself up to a feeling very natural in those whose childhood has been passed in an atmosphere of feminine solicitude. Accustomed by the two noble creatures who had watched over his childhood always to associate the idea of a woman with something inexpressibly delicate

and pure, it was inevitable that the awakening of love should in his case be accomplished in a sort of religious and reverential emotion. He must extend to the person he loved, whoever she might be, all the devotion that he had conceived for the saints whose son he was.

A prey to this strange confusion of ideas, he had, on that very first evening on his return home, spoken of Theresa to his mother and his grandmother, who were waiting for him, in terms which had necessarily aroused the mistrust of the two women. He understood that now. But what young man has ever begun to love without being hurried by the sweet intoxication of the beginnings of a passion into confidences that were irreparable, and too often deathful, to the future of his feelings?

In what manner and by what stage had this feeling entered into him? He could not have told that. When once a man loves, does it not seem as though he has always loved? Scenes were evoked, nevertheless, which reminded Hubert of the insensible habituation which had

led him to visit Theresa several times a week. But had he not been gradually introduced at her house to all her friends, and, as soon as he had left his card, had he not found himself invited in all directions into that world which he scarcely knew, and which was composed partly of high functionaries of the fallen administration, partly of great manufacturers and political financiers, and partly, again, of celebrated artists and wealthy foreigners.

It formed a society free from constraint and full of luxury, pleasure and life, but one the tone of which ought to have displeased the young man, for he could not comprehend its qualities of elegance and refinement, and he was very sensible of its terrible fault—the want of silence, of moral life, and of long custom. Ah! he was not much concerned with observations of this kind, occupied solely as he was to know where he should perceive Madame de Sauve and her eyes. He called to mind countless times at which he had met her—sometimes at her own house, seated at the corner of her fire-place,

towards the close of the afternoon, and lost in one of her silent reveries; sometimes visiting in full costume and smiling with her Herodias lips at conversations about dresses or bonnets; sometimes in the front of a box at a theatre and talking in undertones during an interval; sometimes in the tumult of the street, dashing along behind her bright bay horse and bowing her head at the window with a graceful movement.

The recollection of this carriage produced a new association of ideas in Hubert, and he could see again the moment at which he had confessed the secret of his feelings for the first time. Madame de Sauve and he had met that day about five o'clock in a drawing-room in the Avenue du Bois de Boulogne, and as it was beginning to rain in torrents the young woman had proposed to Hubert, who had come on foot, to take him in her carriage, having, she said, a visit to pay near the Rue Vaneau, which would enable her to leave him at his door on the way. He had, in fact, taken his seat beside her in the narrow double brougham lined with

green leather, in which there lingered something of that subtle atmosphere which makes the carriage of an elegant woman a sort of little boudoir on wheels, with all the trifling objects belonging to a pretty interior. The hot-water jar was growing lukewarm beneath their feet ; the glass, set in its sheath in front, awaited a glance ; the memorandum book placed in the nook, with its pencil and visiting cards, spoke of worldly tasks ; the clock hanging on the right marked the rapid flight of those sweet minutes. A half-opened book, slipped into the place where portable purchases are usually put, showed that Theresa had obtained the fashionable novel at the book-seller's.

Outside in the streets, where the lamps were beginning to light up, there was the wildness of a glacial winter storm. Theresa, wrapped in a long cloak which showed the outlines of her figure, was silent. In the triple reflection from the carriage lamps, the gas in the street and the expiring day, she was so divinely pale and beautiful that Hubert, overpowered by emotion, took her

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hand. She did not withdraw it; she looked at him with motionless eyes, that were drowned, as it were, in tears which she would not have dared to shed. Without even hearing the sound of his own words, so intoxicated was he by this look, he said to her :

“ Ah ! how I love you ! ”

She grew still more pale, and laid her gloved hand upon his mouth to make him be silent. He began to kiss this hand madly, seeking for the place where the opening of the glove allowed him to feel the living warmth of the wrist. She replied to this caress by that word which all women utter at like moments—a word so simple, but one into which creep so many inflexions, from the most mortal indifference to the most emotional tenderness—

“ You are a child. ”

“ Do you love me a little ? ” he asked her.

And then, as she looked at him with those same eyes which sent forth a ray of happiness, he could hear her murmur in a stifled voice :

“ A great deal. ”

For most Parisian young men, such a scene would have been the prelude to an effort towards the complete possession of a woman so evidently smitten—an effort which might, perhaps, have miscarried; for a woman of the world who wishes to protect herself finds many means, if she be anything of a coquette, of avoiding a surrender, even after avowals of the kind, or still more compromising marks of attachment. But there was as little coquetry in the case of Madame de Sauve as there was physical daring in that of the child of twenty-two who loved her. Did not these two beings find themselves placed by chance in a situation of the strangest delicacy? He was incapable of any further enterprise by reason of his entire purity. As for her, how could she fail to understand that to offer herself to him was to risk a diminution of his love? Such difficulties are less rare under the conditions imposed upon the feelings by modern manners than the fatuity of men will allow.

As manners are at present, all action between two persons who love each other simultaneously

becomes a sign, and how could a woman who knows this fail to hesitate about compromising her happiness for ever by seeking to embrace it too soon? Did Theresa obey this prudential motive, or did she, perchance, find a heart's delight of delicious novelty in the burning respect of her friend? With all men whom she had met before this one, love had been only a disguised form of desire, and desire itself an intoxicated form of self-pride. But whatever the reason might be, she granted the young man all the meetings that he asked for during the months following this first avowal, and all these meetings remained as essentially innocent as they were clandestine.

While the Boulogne train was carrying Hubert towards the most longed-for of these meetings he remembered the former ones—those passionate and dangerous walks, nearly all hazarded across early Paris. They had in this way adventured their ingenuous and guilty idyll in all the places in which it seemed unlikely that anyone belonging to their set would meet them. How many

times, for instance, had they visited the towers of Notre Dame, where Theresa loved to walk in her youthful grace amid the old stone monsters carved on the balustrades? Through the slender ogive windows of the ascent they looked alternately at the horizon of the river confined between the quays, and that of the street confined between the houses. In one of the buildings crouching in the shadow of the cathedral, on the side of the Rue de Chanoinesse, there was a small apartment on the fifth storey running out into a terrace, behind the panes of which they used to imagine the existence of a romance similar to their own, because they had twice seen a young woman and a young man breakfasting there, seated at the same round table, with the window half open.

Sometimes the squalls of the December wind would roar round the pile, and storms of melted snow would beat upon the walls. Theresa was none the less punctual to the appointment, leaving her cab before the great doorway and crossing the church to go out of it at the side,

and there join Hubert in the dark peristyle which comes before the towers. Her delicate teeth shone in her pretty smile, and her slender figure appeared still more elegant in this ornament of the ancient city. Her happy grace seemed to work even upon the old caretaker who, surrounded by her cats, gives out the tickets from the depths of her lodge, for she used to give her a grateful smile.

It was on the staircase of one of these ancient towers that Hubert had ventured, for the first time, to print a kiss upon the pale face that to him was divine. Theresa was climbing in front of him that morning up the hollowed steps which turn about the stone pillar. She stopped for a minute to take breath; he supported her in his arms, and, as she leaned back gently and rested her head upon his shoulder, their lips met. The emotion was so strong that he was like to die. This first kiss had been followed by another, then by ten, then by such numbers of others that they lost count of them. Oh, those long, thrilling, deep kisses, of which she used to say

tenderly, as though to justify herself in the thought of her sweet accomplice :

“ I am as fond of kisses as a little girl ! ”

They had thus madly peopled all the retreats wherein their imprudent love had taken shelter with these adorable kisses. Hubert could remember having embraced Theresa when they both were seated on a tomb-stone in a deserted walk of one of the Paris cemeteries one bright, warm morning, while around them stretched the garden of the dead, with its funereal landscape of ever-greens and tombs. He had embraced her again on one of the benches in the distant park of Montsouris, one of the least known in the town—a park quite recently planted, crossed by a railway, overlooked by a pavilion of Chinese architecture, and having a horizon formed by the factories in the mournful Glacière quarter stretching around it.

At other times they had driven in an indeterminate fashion along the dull slopes of the fortifications, and when it was time to return home Theresa was always the first to depart.

Himself hidden in the cab, which remained stationary, he could see her crossing the kennels with her dainty feet. She would walk along the footpath, not a spot of mud dishonouring her dress, and would turn as though involuntarily to enwrap him in a last look. It was on such occasions that he was only too sensible of the dangers which he was causing this woman to incur, but when he spoke to her of his fears she would reply, shaking her head with so easily tragic an expression :

“I have no children. What harm can be done to me unless you are taken from me?”

Although they did not belong entirely to each other they had come to employ those familiarities in language which accompany a mutual passion. Nearly every morning they wrote notes to each other, a single one of which would have been sufficient to prove Theresa to be Hubert's mistress, and yet she was nothing of the kind. But whatever the detail over which the young man's memory lingered, he always found that she had not opposed any of the marks of tenderness which

he had asked of her. However, he had never ventured to imagine anything beyond clasping her hands, her waist, her face, or resting, like a child, upon her heart. She had with him that entire, confiding, indulgent abandonment of soul which is the only token of true love that the most skilful coquetry cannot imitate.

And in contrast with this tenderness, and serving to heighten its sweetness still more, each scene in this idyll had corresponded to some painful explanation between the young man and his mother, or some cruel anguish on finding Madame de Sauve in the evening with her husband. The latter, in reality, paid no attention to Hubert, but Madame Liauran's son was not yet accustomed to the dishonouring falsehood of the cordial hand-shake offered to the man who is being deceived. What mattered these trifles, however, since they were going—he to join her, and she to wait for him in the little English town at which they were to spend two days together? Was it to Hubert or to Theresa that this idea had occurred? The young man

could not have told. André de Sauve was in Algeria for the purpose of a Parliamentary inquiry.

Theresa had a convent friend who lived in the country, and was sufficiently trustworthy to allow her to give out that she had gone to see her. On the other hand she affirmed that the position of Folkestone, on the way from Paris to London, made it the safest shelter in winter, because French travellers pass through the town without ever stopping there. At the mere thought of seeing her again, Hubert's heart melted in his breast, and, with a quivering impossible of definition, he felt himself on the point of rolling into a gulf of mystery, of intoxicating forgetfulness and felicity.

CHAPTER IV.

THE packet was approaching the Folkestone pier. The slender hull heaved on the sea, which was perfectly green, and was scantily striated with silver foam. The two white funnels gave forth smoke which curved behind under the pressure of the air rent by the course of the vessel. The two huge red wheels beat the waves, and behind the boat stretched a hollow moving track—a sort of glaucous path, fringed with foam. It was a day with a pale, hazy blue sky, such as frequently occurs on the English coast towards the end of winter—a day of tenderness, and one which harmonised divinely with the young man's thoughts. He had rested his elbows on the netting in the fore part of the vessel, and had not stirred since the beginning of the passage, which had been one of rare smoothness. He could now see the smallest details of the approach

to the harbour: the chalky line of coast to the right, with its covering of meagre turf; to the left the pier resting on its piles; and beyond the pier, and still more to the left, the little town, with its houses rising one above another from the base of the cliff to the crest. One by one he scanned these houses, which stood out with a clearness that grew constantly more distinct. Which among them all was the refuge where his happiness was awaiting him in the loved features of Theresa de Sauve? Which of them was the Star Hotel, chosen by his friend from the guide-book on account of its name?

“I am superstitious,” she had said childishly; “and then, are you not my dear star?”

She would employ these sudden caresses in language which afterwards occupied Hubert's thoughts for an indefinite time. He was quite aware that she would not be waiting for him on the quay, and his eyes sought for her in spite of himself. But she had multiplied precautions even to arriving herself the evening before by Calais and Dover. The packet is still approaching. It is

possible to distinguish the faces of some inhabitants of the town, whose only diversion consists in coming to the end of the pier in order to witness the arrival of the tidal boat. A few minutes more and Hubert will be beside Theresa. Ah, if she were to fail him at the rendezvous! What if she had been sick or overtaken, or if she had died on the way! The whole legion of foolish suppositions file before the thoughts of the restless lover.

The boat is in the harbour; the passengers land and hurry to the train. Hubert was almost the only one to halt in the little town. He allowed his trunk to go on to London, and took his seat with his portmanteau in one of the flies standing in front of the terminus. He had felt something like a touch of melancholy when speaking to the driver and thus ascertaining how correct and intelligible his English was, notwithstanding that it was his first journey to England. He recalled his childhood, his Yorkshire governess, his mother's care to make him speak every day. If this poor mother were to see him now! Then these memories were

gradually effaced as the light vehicle, drawn by a pony at a trot, briskly climbed the rude ascent by which the upper part of the town is reached. To the left of the young man stretched the wonderful landscape of the sea, an immense gulf of pale green, blending in its extreme line with a gulf of blue, and dotted all over with barques, schooners, and steamers. On the summit the road turned.

The carriage left the cliff, entered a street, then a second, and then a third, all lined with low houses, whose projecting windows showed rows of red geraniums and ferns behind their panes. At a turning Hubert perceived the door of a vast Gothic building and a black plate, the mere inscription on which, in its gilt letters, made his heart leap. He found himself in front of the Star Hotel. There was an interval for inquiring at the office whether Madame Sylvie had arrived—this was the name that Theresa had chosen to assume on account of the initials engraven on all her toilet articles, and she was to have been entered in the books as a dramatic artist; for

ascending two storeys and passing down a long corridor ; then the servant opened the door of a small apartment, and there, seated at a table in a drawing-room, the paleness of her face increased by deep emotion, and her form clad in a garment of a red silky material whose graceful folds outlined without accentuating her figure,—there was Theresa. The coal fire glowed in the fireplace, the inner sides of which were covered with coloured ware. A rotunda-like window, of the kind that the English call “bow windows,” was at the end of the apartment, to which the furniture usual in such rooms in Great Britain gave an aspect of quiet homeliness.

“Ah ! it is really you,” said the young man, going up to Theresa, who was smiling at him, and he laid his hand upon his mistress’s bosom as though to convince himself of her existence. This gentle pressure enabled him to feel beneath the slight material the passionate beatings of the happy woman’s heart.

“Yes, it is really I,” she replied, with more languor than usual.

He sat down beside her and their lips met. It was one of those kisses of supreme delight in which two lovers meeting after absence strive to impart, together with the tenderness of the present hour, all the unexpressed tender-nesses of the hours that have been lost. A tap at the door separated them.

"It is for your luggage," said Theresa, pushing her lover away with a gesture of regret; then, with a subtle smile: "Would you like to see your room? I have been here since yesterday evening; I hope that you will be pleased with everything. I thought so much of you in getting the little room ready."

She drew him by the hand into an apartment which adjoined the drawing-room, and the window of which looked upon the garden of the hotel. The fire was lighted in the fireplace. Vases, gay with flowers, stood on the bracket and also on the table, over which Theresa, to give it a more homelike appearance, had spread a Japanese cloth which she had brought. On it she had placed three frames with those

portraits of herself which the young man preferred. He turned to thank her, and he encountered one of those looks which make the heart quite faint, and with which an affectionate woman seems to thank him whom she loves for the pleasure which he has been pleased to receive from her. But the presence of the servant engaged in setting down and opening the portmanteau prevented him from replying to this look with a kiss.

"You must be tired," she said; "while you are settling down I will go and tell them to get tea ready in the drawing-room. If you knew how sweet it is to me to wait on you ——."

"Go," he said, unable to find a phrase in reply, so completely was his soul possessed with happy emotion. "How I love her!" he added in a whisper, and to himself, as he watched her disappearing through the door with that figure and walk of a young girl which were still left her by her childless marriage; and he was obliged to sit down that he might not swoon before the evidence of his felicity. The human creature is

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naturally so organised for misfortune that there is something ravishing in the complete realisation of desire, like a sudden entry upon a miracle or a dream, and, at a certain degree of intensity, it seems as if the joy were not true. And then, was not the novelty of the situation bound to act like a sort of opium upon the brain of this child, who could not comprehend that his mistress had seized upon the circumstance to evade by this very strangeness the difficulties preliminary to a more complete surrender of her person?

Yes, was this joy true? Hubert asked himself the question a quarter of an hour later, seated beside Madame de Sauve in the little drawing-room at the square table, on which were placed all the apparatus necessary to lend it enjoyment: the silver teapot, the ewer of hot water, the delicate cups. Had she not brought those two cups from Paris with her in order, doubtless, always to have them? She waited on him, as she had said, with her pretty hands, from which she had taken her wedding ring, in order to remove from the young man's thoughts all occasion for remembering that

she was not free. During those afternoon hours, the silence of the little town was almost palpable around them, and the sense of a common solitude deepening in their hearts was so intense that they did not speak, as though they feared that their words might awake them from the intoxicating kind of sleep which was creeping over their souls. Hubert had his head resting upon his hand, and was looking at Theresa. He felt her at this moment so completely his own, so near to his most secret being, that he had even ceased to experience the need of her caresses.

She was the first to break the silence, of which she suddenly became afraid. She rose from her chair and came and sat down upon the ground at the young man's feet, with her head on his knees, and, as he still continued motionless, there was disquiet in her eyes; then submissively, and in that subdued tone of voice which no lover has ever resisted, she said :

"If you knew how I tremble lest I should displease you! I cried yesterday evening beside the fire in this room, where I was waiting for

you, thinking that you would be sure to love me less after my coming here. Ah! you will be angry with me for loving you too much, and for venturing to do what I have done for you!"

The anguish preying upon this charming woman was so great that Hubert saw her features change somewhat as she uttered these words. The whole drama which had been enacted within her from the beginning of this attachment took form for the first time. At this moment especially, seeing him so young, so pure, so free from brutality, so completely in accordance with her dream, she felt a mad longing to lavish marks of her tenderness upon him, and she trembled more than ever lest she should offend him, or perhaps—for there are such strange recesses in feminine consciences—corrupt him. Giving herself up to the pleasure of thinking aloud upon these things for the first time, she went on :

"We women, when we love, can do nothing else but love. From the day when I met you coming back from the country I have belonged to you. I would have followed you wherever you

had asked me to follow you. Nothing has had any further existence for me—nothing but yourself; no,” she added with a fixed look, “neither good nor evil, nor duty, nor remembrance. But can you understand that—you who think, as all men do, that it is a crime to love when one is not free?”

“I have ceased to know,” replied Hubert, bending towards her to raise her, “except that you are to me the noblest and dearest of women.”

“No, let me remain at your feet, like your little slave,” she rejoined, with an expression of ecstasy; “but is it truly true? Ah! swear to me that you will never speak ill to yourself of this hour.”

“I swear it,” said the young man, who was overcome by his mistress’s emotion without well knowing why.

At this simple speech she raised her head; she stood up as lightly as a young girl, and leaning over Hubert began to cover his face with passionate kisses, then, knitting her brows and making an effort, as it were, over herself, she

left him, drew her hands over her eyes, and said in a calmer, though still uncertain voice :

“ I am foolish ; we must go out. I will go and put on my bonnet and we will take a drive. Will you be so kind as to ask for a carriage ? ” she added in English.

When she spoke this language her pronunciation became something perfectly graceful and almost child-like ; and giving him a coquettish little salute with her hand she left the drawing-room by a door opposite to that of Hubert's apartment.

This same mixture of fond anxiety, sudden exaltation, and tender childishness continued on her part through the whole drive, which, to both of them, was made up of a sequence of supreme emotions. By a chance such as does not occur twice in the course of a human life, they found themselves placed precisely in such circumstances as must lift their souls to the highest possible degree of love. The social world, with its murderous duties, was far away. It had as little existence for their minds as the driver, who,

perched up behind them and invisible, drove the light cab in which they found themselves alone together, along the route from Folkestone to Sandgate and Hythe. The world of hope, on the other hand, opened up before them like a garden arrayed in the most beautiful flowers. They saw themselves rewarded—he for his innocence, and she for the reserve imposed by her upon her reason, with an experience as delicious as it is rare: they enjoyed the intimacy of heart which usually comes only after long possession, and they enjoyed it in all the freshness of timid desire. But this timid desire had in both cases a background of intoxicating certainty, lucid to Theresa though still obscure to Hubert; and it was in a vast and noble landscape that they were filled with these rare sensations.

They were now following the road from Folkestone to Hythe, a slender ribbon running along by the sea. The green cliff is devoid of rocks, but its height is sufficient to give the road over which it hangs that look of a sheltered retreat which imparts a restful charm to valleys

lying at mountain bases. The shingle beach was covered by the high tide. Not a bird was flying over the wide, moving sea. Its greenish immensity shaded to violet as the closing day shadowed the cold azure of the sky. The vehicle went quickly on its two wheels, drawn by a strong-backed horse, whose over-large bit forced him at times to throw up his head with a wrench of his mouth. Theresa and Hubert, close to each other in their sort of sentry-box on wheels, held each other's hands beneath the travelling plaid that was wrapped about them. They suffered their passion to dilate like the ocean, to tremble within them with the plentitude of the billows, to grow wild like that barren coast.

Since the young woman had asked that singular oath of her lover, she seemed somewhat calmer, in spite of flashes of sudden reverie which dissolved into mute effusions. On his side, he had never loved her so completely. He could not refrain from taking her ceaselessly to him and pressing her in his arms. An infinite longing to draw still more closely to her mounted to his

brain and intoxicated him, and yet he dreaded the coming of the evening with the mortal anguish of those to whom the feminine universe is a mystery. In spite of the proofs of passion that Theresa showed him, he felt himself in her presence a prey to an insurmountable impotence of will, which would have grown to pain had he not at the same time had an immense confidence in the soul of this woman. The feeling of an unknown abyss into which their love was about to plunge, and which might have terrified him with an almost animal fear, became more tranquil because he was descending into the abyss with her. In truth she had a charming understanding of the troubles which must agitate him whom she loved; was it not in order to spare his overstrung nerves that she had brought him for this drive, during which the grandeur of the prospect, the breeze from the offing, and the walking at intervals, kept both herself and him above the disquietude inevitable to a too ardent desire.

They went on in this manner until the tragic

hour when the stars shine in the nocturnal sky, now walking over the shingle, now getting into the little carriage again, ceaselessly following the same paths again and again, without being able to make up their minds to return, as though understanding that they might again experience other moments of happiness, but of happiness such as this, never ! The dim intuition of the universal soul, of which visible forms and invisible feelings are alike the effect, revealed to them, unknown to themselves, a mysterious analogy, and, as it were, a divine correspondence between the particular face of this corner of nature and the undefined essence of their tenderness. She said to him :

“ To be with you here is a happiness too great to admit of a return to life,” and he did not smile with incredulity at these words, as she felt assured when he said to her :

“ It seems to me that I have never opened my eyes upon a landscape until this moment.”

And when they walked it was he who took Theresa's arm and leaned coaxingly upon it.

Without knowing it he thus symbolised the strange reversal of parts in this attachment in accordance with which he, with his frail person, his entire innocence, and the purity of his timorous emotions, had always represented the feminine element. Certainly she, on her part, was quite a woman, with the suppleness of her gait, the feline refinement of her manners, and those liquid eyes which threw themselves into every look. Nevertheless she appeared a stronger creature and one better armed for life than the delicate child, the fragile handiwork of the tenderness of two pure women, whom she had enmeshed in so slight a tissue of seduction, and who, scarcely taller than herself by a quarter of an inch of forehead, surrendered himself with fraternal confidence; while the mere movement of their gait spoke clearly enough in its perfect, rhythmical harmony, of the complete union of their hearts, causing them to beat at that moment closely together.

They went in again. The dinner following this afternoon of dreams was a silent and almost

sombre one. It seemed as though they were both afraid the one of the other. Or was it merely with her a recrudescence of that dread of displeasing him which had made her defer the surrender of her person until this hour, and with him that sort of intractable melancholy which is the last sign of primitive animality, and which precedes in man every entry into complete love? As happens at such times, their speech was calmer and more indifferent in proportion as the disquietude of their hearts was increased. These two lovers, who had spent the day in the most romantic exaltation, and who were met in the solitude of this foreign retreat, seemed to have nothing to say to each other but sentences concerning the world that they had left.

They separated early, and just as if they had said good-bye until the following day, although they both knew perfectly well that to sleep apart from each other was impossible to them. Thus Hubert was not astonished, although his heart beat as if it would break when, at the very

moment that he was about to seek her, he heard the key turn in the door, and Theresa entered, clad in a long, pliant wrapper of white lace, and with an impassioned sweetness in her eyes.

“Ah!” she said, closing Hubert’s eyelids with her perfumed fingers, “I want so much to rest upon your heart.”

Towards midnight the young man awoke, and seeking the face of his mistress with his lips, found that her cheeks, which he could not see, were bathed in tears.

“You are grieved,” he said to her.

“No,” she replied, “they are tears of gratitude. Ah!” she went on, “how could they fail to take you from me beforehand, my angel, and how unworthy I am of you!”

Enigmatic words which Hubert was often to remember later on, and which, even at this moment, and in spite of the kisses, raised suddenly within him that vapour of sadness which is the customary accompaniment of pleasure. Through it he could see, as by a lightning flash, a house that was familiar to him, and, bending down

beneath the lamp, among the family portraits, the faces of the two women who had reared him. It was only for a second, and he laid his head upon Theresa's breast, there to forget all thought, while the vague complaining of the sea reached him, softened by the distance—a mysterious and distant murmur like the approach of fate.

CHAPTER V.

A FORTNIGHT later Hubert Liauran stepped upon the platform of the Northern Terminus about five o'clock in the evening, on his return from London by the day train. Count Scilly and Madame Castel were waiting for him. But what were his feelings when, among the faces pressing around the doors, he recognised that of Theresa? They had made an appointment by letter to meet on the evening of that day, which was a Tuesday, in her box at the Théâtre Français. Nevertheless, she had not withstood the desire of seeing him again some hours earlier, and in her eyes there shone supreme emotion, formed of happiness at beholding him and sorrow at being separated from him; for they could only exchange a bow, which, fortunately, escaped the grandmother.

Theresa disappeared, and while the young man

was standing in the luggage-room an involuntary impulse of ill-humour arose within him and caused him to tell himself that the two old people, who, nevertheless, loved him so much, really ought not to have been there. This little painful impression, which, at the very moment of his return, showed him the weight of the chain of family tenderness, was renewed as soon as he found himself again face to face with his mother. From the first glance he felt that he was being studied, and, as he was but little accustomed to dissimulation, he believed that he was seen through. The fact was that his own eyes had been changed, as those of a young girl who has become a woman are changed, with one of those imperceptible alterations which reside in a shade of expression.

But how could the mother be deceived by them—she who for so many years had watched all the reflections of those dark pupils, and who now grasped within them a depth of intoxicated and fathomless felicity? But to the putting of a question on the subject the poor woman was not

equal. Shades of feeling, the principal events in the life of the heart, elude the formulas of phrases, and thence arise the worst misunderstandings. Hubert was very gay during dinner, with a gaiety that was rendered somewhat nervous by the prevision of an approaching difficulty. How would his mother take his going out in the evening? Half-an-hour had not elapsed since leaving table when he rose like one who is about to say good-bye.

“You are leaving us?” said Madame Liauran.

“Yes, mamma,” he replied, with a slight blush on his cheeks; “Emmanuel Deroy has entrusted me with a commission, which is extremely pressing, and which I must execute to-night.”

“You cannot put it off until to-morrow, and give us your first evening?” asked Madame Castel, who wished to spare her daughter the humiliation of a refusal which she could foresee.

“Indeed no, grandmother,” he replied, in a tone of childish playfulness; “that would not be courteous to my friend, who has been so kind to me in London.”

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"He is deceiving us," said Madame Liauran to herself, and, as silence had fallen upon those in the drawing-room after Hubert's departure, she listened to hear whether the hall-door would be opened immediately. Half-an-hour passed without her hearing it. She could not stand it, and she begged the General to go to the young man's room, under pretence of fetching a book, in order to learn whether he had dressed that evening. He had, in fact, done so. He was going, then, to Madame de Sauve's house, or else somewhere in order to meet her again. Such was the conclusion drawn from this indication by the jealous mother, who, for the first time, confessed her lengthened anxieties to the Count. The tone in which she spoke prevented the latter from confessing, in his turn, the loan of one hundred and twenty pounds which Hubert had received from him, and which, so he thought to himself, had doubtless been spent in following this woman.

"He has deceived me once more," exclaimed Madame Liauran; "he who had such a horror of deceit. Ah! how she has changed him!"

Thus the evidence of a metamorphosis of character undergone by her son tortured her on that first day. It became even worse during those which followed. She would not, however, admit all at once that her dear, innocent Hubert was Madame de Sauve's lover. She would not resign herself to the idea that he could be guilty of an error of the kind without terrible remorse. She had brought him up in such strict principles of religion! She did not know that Theresa's first care was just to lull all the young man's scruples of conscience by leading him insensibly from timid tenderness to burning passion. Caught in the mesh of this sweet snare, Hubert had literally never judged his life for the past five months, and nature had become his lover's accomplice. We easily repent of our pleasures, but it is difficult to have remorse for happiness, and the youth was happy with such an absolute felicity as cannot even see the sufferings that it causes.

Nevertheless, it was upon the influence of her suffering that Madame Liauran almost solely

relied in the campaign which she had undertaken—she, a simple woman, who knew nothing of life but its duties—against a creature whom she imagined as being at once fascinating and fatal, bewitching and deadly. She had adopted the ingenuous system which is common to all tender jealousies, and which consisted in showing her distress. She said to herself, “He will see that I am in an agony; will not that suffice?” The misfortune was that Hubert, in the intoxication of his passion, saw in his mother’s distress only tyrannical injustice to a woman whom he looked upon as divine, and to a love which he considered sublime. When he returned from the Bois de Boulogne in the morning, after taking a ride on horseback and seeing Madame de Sauve pass in the carriage drawn by two grey ponies which she drove herself, he would at breakfast encounter the saddened profile of his mother, and would say to himself:

“She has no right to be sad. I have not taken any of my affection from her.”

He reasoned instead of feeling. His mother

laid her bleeding heart in the way before him and he passed it by. When he was to dine out, and his mother's good-bye at the moment of his departure forewarned him that Madame Liauran would spend an evening of melancholy in regretting him, he would think :

“ Yet what if she knew that Theresa reproaches me for devoting too much of my time to her love ! ”

And it was true. His mistress had the ready generosity of women who know that they are vastly preferred, and who are very careful not to ask the man who loves them to act as they wish. There is such a delicate pleasure in leaving one's lover free, in encouraging him, even, to sacrifice you, when it is certain what his decision will be ! It thus happened that Hubert would return to the house in the Rue Vaneau after having a secret meeting with Theresa during the day, — for Emmanuel Deroy had put his small bachelor abode in the Avenue Friedland at his friend's disposal. But then, whether it was that the nervous sadness which

accompanies over-keen pleasures made him cruel, or that secret remorse of conscience came to torment him, or that there was too strong a contrast between the charming forms assumed by Theresa's tenderness and the sad ones in which that of Madame Liauran was arrayed, the young man became really ungrateful.

Irritation, not pity, increased within him before the sorrow of her whose idolised son he nevertheless was. Marie Alice apprehended this shade of feeling, and she suffered more from it than from all the rest, not divining that the excess of her grief was an irreparable error of management, and that a demoralising comparison was being set up in Alexander Hubert's mind between the severities of his relatives and the fond delights of his chosen affection.

Spent by continual anxiety, the mother had exhausted her strength when an event, unexpected though easy to be foreseen, gave still greater prominence to the antagonism which brought her into ceaseless collision with her son. It was Holy Week. She had counted upon Hubert's

confession and communion for making a supreme attempt, and inducing him to sever relations which she considered as yet incompletely guilty, but full of danger. It could not enter into her head as a fervent Christian that her son would fail in his paschal duty. Thus she felt no doubt with respect to his reply as she asked him at a time when they were alone together :

“On what day will you receive the sacrament this year?”

“Mamma,” replied Hubert, with evident embarrassment, “I ask your forgiveness for the sorrow that I am going to cause you. I must, however, confess to you that doubts have come upon me, and that conscientiously I do not think that I can approach the holy table.”

This reply was the lightning-flash which suddenly showed Marie Alice the abyss wherein her son had sunk, while she believed him to be merely on the brink. She was not for a moment deceived by Hubert’s imaginary pretext. And whence could religious doubts come to him who for months had not read a book? She knew,

further, her child's simplicity of soul towards the instruction over which she had herself presided. No; if he would not communicate it was because he would not confess. He had a horror of acknowledging some unacknowledgable fault. And what was this if not that one which had been the evil work of the past six months? . . .

An adulterer! Her son was an adulterer! A terrible word, which to her, so loyal and pure and pious, described the most repellant baseness, the ignominy of falsehood mingled with the turpitude of the flesh. In her indignation she found energy to at last open up her whole heart to Hubert. Agitated as she was by religious fears for the salvation of her beloved child, she uttered sentences which she would never have believed herself capable of pronouncing, mentioning Madame de Sauve by name, heaping the harshest reproaches upon her, withering her with all the scorn which a woman who is virtuous can harbour for one who is not, invoking the memory of their common past, threatening and beseeching in turns—in short, throwing aside all calculation.

"You are mistaken, mamma," replied Hubert, who had endured this first assault without speaking. "Madame de Sauve is not at all what you say; but as I cannot allow my friends to be insulted in my presence, I warn you that, on the next conversation of the kind that we have together, I shall leave the house."

And with this rejoinder, uttered with all the coolness that the feeling of his mother's injustice had left him, he quitted the room without another word.

"She has perverted his heart, she has made a monster of him," said Madame Liauran to Madame Castel when telling her of this scene, which was followed by three weeks of silence between mother and son. The latter appeared at breakfast, kissed his mother's forehead, asked her how she was, sat down to table, and did not open his mouth during the entire meal. Most frequently he was not present at dinner. He had confided this grief, as he confided all his griefs, to Theresa, who had entreated him to yield.

"Do this," she said, "if it be only for me. It is cruel to me to think that I am the prompter of an evil action in your life."

"Noble darling!" the young man had said, covering her hands with kisses, and drowning himself in the look from those eyes which were so sweet to him.

But if his love for his mistress had been increased by this generosity, so, too, had his sensibility to the rancour which the expressions used in their painful quarrel had stirred up within him against his mother. The latter, however, had been so shaken by this disagreement as to have a recurrence of her nervous malady, which she was able to conceal from him who was its cause. She was almost entirely forbidden to move, which did not prevent her from dragging herself at night to her window, at the cost of grievous suffering. She would open the panes and then the shutters silently, and with the precaution of a criminal, in order to see the illumination of Hubert's casements on his return, and as she gazed at this light

filtering in a slender stream, and witnessing to the presence of the son at once so dear and so completely lost, she would feel her anger relax, and despair take possession of her.

They were reconciled, thanks to the intervention of Madame Castel, who, between these two hostilities, suffered a double martyrdom. From the mother she obtained the promise that Madame de Sauve should never again be spoken of, and from the son apologies for his sulkiness during so many days. A fresh period began, in which Marie Alice sought to keep Hubert at home by some modification in her mode of life. Obstinate hoping even in despair, as happens whenever the heart holds too passionate a desire, she told herself that this woman's power over her son must be largely the result of the recreation that he derived from the society surrounding her. Was not the home in the Rue Vaneau very monotonous for an idle young man?

She now felt that she had been very imprudent in considering Hubert's health too delicate, and

in being, moreover, too desirous of his presence to give him a profession. She was ingenious enough to tell herself that she ought to enliven their solitude, and, for the first time during her widowhood, she gave some large dinner-parties. The doors of the house were thrown open. The chandeliers were lighted. The old silver plate, with the De Trans' arms upon it, adorned the table, around which crowded some old people, and some charming young girls as elegant and pretty as the De Trans' cousins were countrified and awkward.

But since Hubert had been in love with Theresa he had, with a sweet exaggeration of fidelity, forbidden himself ever to look at any woman but her. And then it was the month of May. The days were warm and bright. His mistress and he had ventured upon excursions in some of the woods which surround Paris—at Saint Cloud, at Chaville, and in the Forest of Marly. Sitting in the dining-room in the Rue Vaneau, Hubert would recall Theresa's smile on offering him a flower, the alternation of sunlight and shadow

from the foliage upon her forehead, the paleness of her complexion among the greenness, a gesture that she had made, the turn of her foot on the grass of a pathway.

If he listened to the conversation it was to compare the talk of Madame Liauran's guests with the repartees of Madame de Sauve. The first abounded in prejudice, which is the inevitable ransom of all very profound moral life. The second were impregnated with that Parisian wit the sad vacuity of which was no longer apparent to the young man. He assisted, then, at his mother's dinners with the face of one whose soul was elsewhere.

"Ah! what can I do—what can I do?" sobbed Madame Liauran; "everything wearies him of us, and everything amuses him with that woman.

"Wait," replied Madame Castel.

Wait! It is Wisdom's last word; but the impassioned soul devours itself grievously in the waiting. As for Marie Alice, whose life was wholly concentrated upon her child, every hour

now was turning the knife about in the wound. She found it impossible not to abandon herself ceaselessly to that inquisition into petty details to which the noblest jealousies are victims. She noticed in her son every new trifle such as young men wear, and asked herself whether some memory of his guilty love was not attached to it.

Thus he had on his little finger a gold wedding ring which she did not recognise as one of his own. Ah ! what would she have given to know whether there were words and a date engraved on the inside ! Sometimes, when kissing him, she would inhale a scent the name of which she did not know, and which was certainly that used by his mistress. Whenever Madame Liauran encountered the penetrating and voluptuous delicacy of this perfume, it was as though a hand had physically bruised her heart. At last her passion had reached such a pitch, that everything was bound to inflict, and did inflict, a wound. If she ascertained that his eyes looked worn and his complexion pale, she would say to her mother :

“ She will kill me.”

It had always been the custom in this simple-mannered family that the letters should be given into the hands of Madame Liauran herself, who afterwards distributed them to their several owners. Hubert had not ventured to ask Firmin, the doorkeeper, to break the rule for him. Would not this have been to admit the servant into the secret of the differences which separated his mother and himself? Now, his mistress and he used to correspond every day, whether they had already met or not, with the prodigality of heart characteristic of lovers who know not how to give enough of themselves to each other. Hubert often succeeded in preventing his mother from seeing these letters by making an agreement as to the exact time that Theresa should despatch her note, and hastening down in time to take the post himself from the doorkeeper's hands.

Often, also, the letter would arrive unpunctually, and had to come to him through Madame Liauran. The latter was never deceived about

it. She recognised the writing which to her was the most hateful in the world. Often, again, instead of a letter, Theresa would send one of those little blue, quick-travelling missives, and the sense that this paper had been handled by her son's mistress an hour before was intolerable to the poor woman. To save Hubert dishonourable strategies, and herself such terrible palpitation of the heart, she resolved upon ordering her son's letters to be delivered directly to himself. But then she lost the only tokens she possessed of the reality of the young man's relations with Madame de Sauve, and this was a source of fresh hopes, and consequently of fresh disillusion.

In the month of July, Hubert ceased to go out in the evening, and she imagined that they had quarrelled; then George Liauran, whom she had made a confidant of her anxieties, because she knew that he was acquainted with Theresa, informed her that the latter had left for Trouville, and the deception was a blow the more to her. It is the privilege and the scourge of those organisms in which nerves predominate, that

griefs, instead of being lulled by habituation, become incessantly more exaggerated and inflamed. The smallest details comprehend an infinity of sorrow within them, as a drop of water comprehends the infinity of heaven.

CHAPTER VI.

OF the few persons composing the home circle in the Rue Vaneau, it was George Liauran himself who was most anxious about the sorrow of Marie Alice, because it was to him that she most completely betrayed her pain. She understood that he was the only one who might some day be of service to her. At every visit he compared the ravages which her one thought had wrought upon her. Her features were growing thin, her cheeks hollow, and her complexion livid, while her hair, hitherto so dark, was whitening in entire tresses. It sometimes happened that George would go out into society at the conclusion of one of these visits, and meet his cousin Hubert, nearly always in the same circle as Madame de Sauve, elegant, handsome, with brilliant eyes and happy mouth.

The contrast roused within him strange feelings, which were a mixture of good and evil. On the one hand, indeed, George was very fond of Marie Alice, and with an affection which, during the early days of their youth, had been a very romantic one with them both. On the other, the, to him, indubitable connection between this charming Hubert and Theresa irritated him with a nervous anger without his well knowing why. He felt towards his cousin that insurmountable ill-will which men of more than forty and less than fifty years of age profess for the very young men whom they see making their way in society, and, in fact, taking their own places.

And then he was one of those who have been hard livers, and who hate love, whether because they have suffered too much from it, or because they feel too much regret for it. This hatred of love was complicated with a complete contempt for women who make slips, and he suspected Theresa of having already had two intrigues—one with a young deputy, named Frederick Luzel, and the other with Alfred Fanières, a celebrated writer.

He was one of those who judge a woman by her lovers, wherein he was wrong, for the reasons which lead a poor creature to surrender herself are most frequently personal, and foreign to the nature and character of him who is the cause of the surrender. Now, the great frankness of Frederick Luzel's manners was a cover to complete brutality; while Alfred Fanières was a rather handsome fellow of refined manners, whose cajolery scarcely concealed the fierce egotism of the skilful artist, with whom everything is simply a means for rising, from his abilities as a prose writer to his successes of the alcove.

It was upon the germ of corruption deposited by these two characters in Theresa's heart that George secretly relied when imagining a probable termination to Hubert's attachment. He told himself that Madame de Sauve must have acquired habits of pleasure and exigencies of sensation with these two men, whose cynicism and morals were known to him. He calculated that Hubert's purity would some day leave her

unsatisfied, and on that day it was almost inevitable that she should deceive him. "After all," he said to himself, "it will give him pain, but it will teach him life." George Liauran, in this respect similar to three-fourths of those of his own age and social standing, was persuaded that a young man ought, as soon as possible, to frame for himself a practical philosophy, that is to say, he should, in accordance with the old misanthropical formulas, have small belief in friendship, look upon most women as rogues, and explain all human actions by interest, avowed or disguised. Worldly pessimism has not much more originality than this. Unfortunately it is nearly always right.

Such was the state of mind of Madame Liauran's cousin respecting the sentiments of Hubert and Theresa, when, in October of the same year, he happened to find himself dining with five others in a private room at the Café Anglais. The repast had been refined and well contrived, and the wines exquisite, and coffee having been served, and cigars lighted, they were

chatting as men do among themselves. The following is a scrap of dialogue which George overheard between his left-hand neighbour and one of the guests, and that at a time when he himself had just been talking with his right-hand neighbour, so that at first the full import of the words escaped him :

“We saw them,” said the narrator, “through the telescope, from the upper room in Arthur’s chalet that he uses as a studio, as though they had been only three yards distant. She entered, in fact, as we had heard that she did the day before, and she had scarcely done so when he gave her a kiss—but such a kiss! . . .” and he smacked his lips as he drained a last drop of liqueur that had remained in his glass.

“Who is ‘he’?” asked George Liauran.

“La Croix-Firmin.”

“And ‘she’?”

“Madame de Sauve.”

“By Jove!” said George to himself, “this is a strange business; it was worth while accepting this fool’s invitation.”

And with this thought he looked at his host—an exquisite of low degree—who was exulting with joy at entertaining a few clubmen who were quite in the fashion.

“We were expecting something better,” the other went on to say, “but she insisted on lowering the curtains. How we chaffed Ludovic about his jaded look in the morning! Nothing else was spoken of for a week between Trouville and Deauville. She suspected it, for she left very quickly. But I will wager a pony that she will be received everywhere this winter as well as before. The tolerance of Society is becoming——”

“Home-like,” said the interlocutor, and the talk continued to go round, the cigars to be smoked, the kummel cognac to fill the little glasses, and these moralists to pass judgment upon life. The young man who had told the scandalous anecdote about Madame de Sauve in the course of the conversation, was about thirty years old, pale, slight, already used up, and, for the rest, very amiable and one of those whose

name universally attracts the epithet of "good fellow." In fact he would have blown his brains out sooner than not have paid a gambling debt within the appointed time. He had never declined an affair of honour, and his friends could rely upon him for a service though difficult, or an advance of money though considerable.

But as to speaking, after drinking, of what one knows about the intrigues of women of the world, where should we be if we tried to forbid ourselves this subject of conversation, as well as hypotheses concerning the secrets of the birth of adulterine children? Perhaps the very chatterer who had borne eye-witness to the levity of Theresa de Sauve would have shed genuine tears of sorrow if he had known that his speech would have been employed as a weapon against the young woman's happiness. It is an exhaustless source of melancholy for one who mixes with the world without corrupting his heart, to see how cruelties are sometimes effected in it with complete security of conscience. But furthermore, would not George Liauran have learnt from

another source all the details which the indiscretion of his table companion had just revealed to him so suddenly and with such unassailable precision ?

Truth to tell, he was not astonished by it for a moment. Two or three times, indeed, on his way home, he repeated the words "Poor Hubert !" to himself, but he secretly felt the mean and irresistible egotistic titillation which is nine times out of ten produced by the sight of other people's misfortunes. Were not his prognostications verified ? And this, too, was not devoid of a certain charm. Vulgar misanthropy has many such satisfactions, which harden the heart that feels them. When a man despises humanity with an indiscriminating contempt, he ends by feeling satisfaction at its wretchedness, instead of being distressed by it.

As for doubt, he did not admit it for a moment, especially when recalling what he knew of Ludovic de la Croix-Firmin. The latter was a species of coxcomb, who might, on reflection, appear to be devoid of any superiority ; but he was liked

by women, for those mysterious reasons which we men can no more understand than women can understand the secret of the influence exercised over us by some of themselves. It is probable that into these reasons there enters a good deal of that bestiality which is always present at the bottom of our personal relations. La Croix-Firmin was twenty-seven years old, the age of the fullest vigour, with light hair bordering upon red, blue eyes, a clear complexion, and teeth whose whiteness gleamed between a pair of very fresh lips at every smile. When he smiled in this way, with his dimpled chin, his square nose, and his curly locks, he recalled that type, immortal through the races, of the countenance of Faunus, which the ancients made the incarnation of happy sensuality.

To complete that quality of physical charm to which many fancies that he had inspired were due, he had a suppleness of movement peculiar to those in whom the vital force is very complete. He was of medium height, but athletic. Although his ignorance was absolute and his intelligence

very moderate, he possessed the gift which renders a man of his make a dangerous person; he had, in a rare degree, that tact and perception which reveal the moment when a venture may be made, and when woman, a creature of rapid moods and fleeting emotions, belongs to the libertine who can divine it.

This La Croix-Firmin had had many intrigues, and, although his birth and his future ought to have made him a perfect gentleman, he liked to relate them; these indiscretions, instead of ruining him, served him, so to speak, as advertisements. In spite of his light conversation and his conceit, he had not made a single enemy among the women who had compromised themselves for him; perhaps because he imaged to their memories nothing but happy sensation—" 'tis the material of the best recollections," the cynics say, and, in respect of souls devoid of loftiness, what can be more true?

It was precisely upon La Croix-Firmin's indiscretion that George relied for mustering some fresh proofs in support of the fact which he had.

learned at the dinner at the Café Anglais. Being an old bachelor, he had a gloomy imagination, and could foresee ill-fortune rather than good. He had, consequently, long been accustomed to see clearly through the surface of the social world. He understood the art of going in pursuit of secret truth, and he excelled in combining into a single whole the scattered sayings floating in the atmosphere of Parisian conversation. In this particular case there was no need of so many efforts. It was simply a matter of finding corroboration for a detail indisputable in itself.

A few visits to women in society who had spent the season at Trouville, and a single one to Ella Virieux, a woman belonging to the demi-monde, and the recognised mistress of La Croix-Firmin's best comrade, were sufficient for the inquiry. It was quite certain that Ludovic had been Madame de Sauve's lover, and that the fact was not only one of public notoriety, but had been established by his own avowal at the seaside. A hasty departure had alone preserved

Theresa from an inevitable affront, and now that Parisian life was beginning again, ten new scandals were causing this summer scandal, destined to become dubious like so many others, to be already forgotten.

George Liauran perceived in it a sure means of at last breaking the connection between Hubert and Theresa. It was sufficient for this purpose to warn Marie Alice. He felt, indeed, a moment's hesitation, for after all he was meddling with a story which did not at all concern him; but the unacknowledged hatred towards the two lovers which was hidden at the bottom of his heart carried him over this delicate scrupulousness, as well as the real desire to free a woman whom he loved from mortal distress.

On the very evening of the day of his conversation with Ella Virieux, who, without attaching any further importance to the matter, had reported to him the secrets which Ludovic had confided to her lover, he was at the Rue Vaneau and relating to Madame Liauran, who was reclining beside

Madame Castel's easy chair, the unlooked-for news which was at a stroke to change the aspect of the strife between mother and mistress.

"Ah! the wretch!" cried the poor woman, half-dead from her lengthened anguish, "she was not even capable of loving him——"

She uttered these words in a deep tone, wherein were condensed all the ideas which she had formed so long before about her son's mistress. She had thought so much about what the nature of this guilty creature's passion could possibly be to render it more potent over Hubert's heart than her own love, which, for all that, she knew to be infinite! Shaking her whitened head, so wearied with musing, she went on:

"And it is for such a woman as this that he has tortured us! Ah! mamma, when he compares what he has sacrificed with what he has preferred, he will not understand his own behaviour."

Then, holding out her hand to George:

"Thank you, cousin," she said. "You have

saved me. If this horrible intrigue had lasted, I should have died."

"Alas, my poor daughter," said Madame Castel, stroking her hair, "do not feed upon vain hopes. If Hubert has ever loved you he loves you still. Nothing is changed. There is only one evil action the more committed by this woman, and she must be accustomed to it."

"Then you think that he will not know of all this?" said Marie Alice, raising herself. "But I should be the basest of the base if I were not to open this unhappy child's eyes. So long as I believed that she loved him, I was able to keep silence. Guilty as such love might be, it nevertheless had passion; it was something sincere after all, something erring, yet exalted—but now, what name can you give such abominations?"

"Be prudent, cousin," said George Liauran, somewhat disquieted by the anger with which these last words had been uttered; "remember that we are not in a position to give poor Hubert such palpable and undeniable proofs as would baffle all discussion."

"But what further proof do you want," she broke in, "than the assertion of a spectator?"

"Pooh!" said George; "for those who are in love——"

"You do not know my son," returned the mother, proudly. "There is no such compliance in him. I only want a promise from you before taking action. You will relate to him what you have told to us, and as you have told it to us, if he asks you."

"Certainly," said George, after a pause; "I will tell him what I know, and he will draw what conclusions he pleases."

"And what if he were to pick a quarrel with this Monsieur de la Croix-Firmin?" asked Madame Castel.

"He could not," rejoined the mother, whose hopeful over-excitement rendered her at that moment as keen-sighted respecting the laws of society as George himself could have been; "our Hubert is too honourable a man to allow a woman's name to be talked about through him, even though it were hers."

Yes, poor Hubert ! Hour by hour there was thus drawing closer to him that destiny which the sound of the sea, as heard in the night, would have symbolised to him during his divine waking at Folkestone had he possessed more knowledge of life. It was drawing closer, this destiny, taking for its instrument alternately George Liauran's malevolent indifference and Marie Alice's blind passion. The last-named, at least, believed that she was working for her son's happiness, not understanding that, when in love, it is better to be deceived even a great deal than to suspect the fact a little.

And yet, notwithstanding what she had said in her conversation with her cousin, she did not feel equal to speaking herself to her son. She was incapable of enduring the first outbreak of his grief. Assuredly the proofs given by George appeared to her impossible of refutation, and again, in her conscience as a pious mother, she considered that it was her absolute duty to snatch her son from the monster who was corrupting him. But how could she receive the

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counter-stroke of rebellion which would follow the revelation?

Nevertheless, she hoped that he would return to her in his moments of despair. She would open her arms to him, and all this nightmare of misunderstandings would vanish in effusiveness,—as of old. Involuntarily, through a mirage familiar to all mothers as to all fathers, she took no accurate account of the change of soul which possibly had been wrought in her son. She still saw in him the child that once she had known, coming to her with his smallest troubles.

Through the false logic of her tenderness it seemed to her that, the obstacle which had separated them once removed, they would find themselves again face to face and the same as before. Her first thought was to send him immediately to see George; then, with her delicate woman's sense, she reflected that this would involve an inevitable wounding of his pride. Once more, therefore, she had recourse to General Scilly's old friendship, requesting him to tell the young man all.

"You are giving me a terribly difficult commission," he replied, when she had explained everything to him. "I will obey you if you require it. I have gone through it myself," he added, "and under almost similar conditions. A quean is a quean, and they are all like one another. But the first man who had hinted as much to me would have spent a bad quarter of an hour. Besides, they had not to speak to me about it, for I learnt it all myself."

"And what did you do?" asked Marie Alice.

"What a man does when he has a leg broken by the bursting of a shell," said the old soldier; "I amputated my heart bravely. It was hard, but I cut clean."

"You can quite see that my son must learn all," replied the mother, in a tone at once of triumph and of pity.

CHAPTER VII.

It was after lunching with one of Madame de Sauve's friends, and tasting the delicious pleasure of seeing his mistress come in with the coffee, that Hubert Liauran betook himself to the Quai d'Orléans, where a line from the General had asked him to be at about three o'clock. The young man had fancied, on receiving his godfather's note, that it had to do with the arrears of his debt. He knew that the Count was fastidious, and he had allowed two months to pass away without clearing off the promised amount. The conversation accordingly began with some words of excuse, which he stammered out immediately on entering the apartment on the ground floor.

He had not revisited it since the eve of his departure for Folkestone, and he experienced in thought all his former sensations on finding the

aspect of the room exactly such as he had left it. The notes on the re-organisation of the army still covered the table; the bust of Marshal Bugeaud adorned the mantel-piece; and the General, attired in a pelisse-shaped dressing-jacket, was methodically smoking his briarwood pipe. To the first words uttered by his godson he merely replied :

“ That is not the question, my dear fellow,” in a voice that was at once grave and sad.

By the mere intonation Hubert understood too well that a scene was preparing of capital importance to himself. If it is puerile to believe in presentiments in the sense in which the crowd take the term, no creature gifted with refinement can deny that the slightest of details are sufficient to invoke an accurate perception of approaching danger. The General was silent, and Hubert could see the name of Madame de Sauve in his eyes and on his lips, although it had never been uttered between his godfather and himself. He waited, therefore, for the resumption of the conversation with that passionate beating of the

heart which makes impatience an almost intolerable torture to highly-strung natures.

Scilly, whose whole sentimental experience since his youth was summed up in a single deception in love, now felt himself seized with great pity for the blow that he was about to inflict upon a youth so dear to himself, and the phrases which he had been putting together during the whole of that morning appeared to him to be devoid of common sense. Nevertheless, it was necessary to speak. At times of supreme uncertainty it is the characteristic impressed upon us by our callings in life which usually manifests itself and guides our action. Scilly was a soldier, brave and exact. He was bound to go, and he did go, straight to the point.

"My boy," he said, with a certain solemnity, "you must first know that I am acquainted with your life. You are the lover of a married woman, who is called Madame de Sauve. Do not deny it. Honour forbids you to tell me the truth. But the essential point is to take immediate precautions."

“Why do you speak to me of this,” replied the young man, rising and taking up his hat, “when you acknowledge that honour commands me not even to listen to you? Look here, godfather, if you have brought me here to broach this subject, let us have no more of it. I prefer to bid you good-bye before quarrelling with you.”

“But it was not to question you nor to lecture you that I asked for this interview,” replied the Count, taking the hand which Hubert had stiffly held out to him. “It was to tell you a very grave fact, and one of which you must, yes, must be informed. Madame de Sauve has another lover, Hubert, who is not yourself.”

“Godfather,” said the young man, disengaging his fingers from those of the old General, and growing pale with sudden anger, “I do not know why you wish me to cease to respect you. It is infamous to say of a woman what you have just said of her.”

“If you were not concerned,” replied the Count, rising, and the sad gravity of his countenance contrasted strangely with the wild looks of

his godson, "you know very well that I would not speak to you of Madame de Sauve or of any other woman. But I love you as I should love a son of my own, and I tell you what I would tell him. You have misplaced your love; the woman has another lover!"

"Who? When? Where? What are your proofs?" replied Hubert, exasperated beyond all bounds by the insistence and coolness of the General; "tell me, tell me——"

"When?—this summer. Who?—a Monsieur de La Croix-Firmin. Where?—at Trouville. But it is the talk of all the drawing-rooms," continued Scilly; and, without naming George, he related the indisputable details which the latter had confided to Madame Liauran, from the statement of the eye-witness to the indiscreet utterances of La Croix-Firmin.

The young man listened without interruption, but to one who knew him the expression of his face was terrible. Anger that was blended of grief and indignation made him grow pale to the lips.

"And who told you this story?" he asked.

"How does that concern you?" said the General, who understood that to indicate the real author of the whole statement to Hubert just at first would be to expose George to a scene which might have a tragical issue. "Yes, how does that concern you since you are not Madame de Sauve's lover?"

"I am her friend," rejoined Hubert; "and I have the right to protect her, as I would protect you, against odious calumnies. Moreover," he added, looking fixedly at his godfather, "if you refuse to answer my question, I give you my word of honour that within two days I will find this Monsieur de La Croix-Firmin who indulges in these knavish calumnies, and I will have something to say to him without any woman's name being mentioned."

The General, seeing Hubert's state of over-excitement, and not knowing what words to use against a frenzy which he had not foreseen,—for it was based upon the most absolute incredulity,—said to himself that Madame Liauran alone possessed the power to calm her son.

"I have told you what I had to tell you," he returned, in a melancholy tone; "if you want to know more, ask your mother."

"My mother?" said the young man violently, "I might have suspected as much. Well! I will go to her."

And half-an-hour later he entered the little drawing-room in the Rue Vaneau, where Madame Liauran was at that moment alone. She was waiting, in fact, for her son, but with mortal anguish. She knew that it was the time for his explanation with Scilly, and the issue of it now frightened her. The sight of Hubert's physiognomy increased her fears. He was livid, with bistre rings beneath his eyes, and Marie Alice immediately felt the counter-shock of this visible emotion.

"I have come from my godfather's, mother," the young man began, "and he has said things to me that I shall not forgive him as long as I live. What pained me still more was that he pretended to have from yourself the calumnies which he repeated to me concerning one whom you may

not like—but I do not recognise your right to brand her to me, to whom she has always been perfect—”

“Do not speak to me in that tone, Hubert,” said Madame Liauran, “you hurt me so. It is just as though you were burying a knife in me here.” She pointed to her bosom.

Ah! it was not only Hubert’s tone, his short, hard tone, that was torturing her; it was above all, and once again, the evidence of the feeling that bound him to Madame de Sauve.

“Of us two,” she thought, “he would choose her.” The immediate result of her grief was to revive her hatred for the woman who was its cause, and in her impulse of aversion she found strength to continue the conversation.

“You have lost the feelings of our home, my child,” she said, in a calmer voice; “you do not understand what tenderness binds us to yourself, and what duties it imposes upon us.”

“Strange duties, if they consist in echoing degrading reports about one whose only offence is that she has inspired me with a deep affection.”

"No," said Madame Liauran, who was growing excited in her turn; "it is not a question of resuming a discussion which has already set us face to face as though for a duel," and the glances of mother and son crossed at that moment like two sword-blades. "It is a question of this—that you love a creature who is unworthy of you, and that I, your mother, have had you told so and tell you so again."

"And I, your son, reply to you—," and he had the word LIE on his lips; then, as though frightened at what he had been going to say—"that you are mistaken, mother. I ask your pardon for speaking to you in this strain," he added, taking her hand and kissing it; "I am not master of myself."

"Listen, my child," said Marie Alice, from whose eyes the unlooked-for kindness of this gesture caused the tears to flow; "I cannot go into all those sad details with you." Here she touched his hair just as in the days when he was a little child. "Go to your cousin George. He will repeat to you all that he has told us. For it

was he who, in his anxiety, thought it his duty to warn us. But remember what your mother tells you now. I believe in the double sight of the heart. I should not have hated this woman as I have hated her from the very first, if she had not been bound to prove fatal to you. Now, good-bye, my child. Kiss me," she added, in broken tones. Did she understand that from that hour her son's kisses would never be to her what they had formerly been?

Hubert dashed from the room, leaped into a cab, and gave the driver the address of the club at which he hoped to find George—a small and very aristocratic one in the Rue du Cirque. But while the man, stimulated by the promise of a large tip, was whipping his horse, the unhappy youth was beginning to reflect upon the entirely unexpected blow which had just fallen upon him. The character of the race of action to which he belonged manifested itself in the recovery of his self-possession.

From the very first he set aside all notion of calumnious invention on the part of his mother

and godfather. That they both detested Theresa, he knew. That they were capable of venturing a great deal in order to detach him from her, had just been proved to him. Yes, Madame Liauran and the Count might venture upon anything, except falsehood. They believed, therefore, what they had said, and they believed it on the word of George Liauran, who had been hawking about one of the thousand infamous reports of Paris ; but with what purpose ? Hubert's mind did not, at this moment, admit that there was an atom of truth in the story of his mistress's relations with another man.

He did not wait to discuss the fact within himself ; he thought only of the person from whose lips the tale had come. What motive, then, had prompted his cousin, to whom he was now going in order to demand an explanation ? He saw him in imagination with his thin face, his pointed beard, his short hair, and his shrewd look. The vision raised within him a strangely uncomfortable feeling, which, though he did not suspect it, was the work of Madame de Sauve.

George had never up to the present spoken to Hubert about her in any way that could admit of allusion or banter.

But women possess a sure instinct of mistrust, and from the first she had noticed that her love was repugnant to Hubert's cousin. She guessed that he saw only the whim of a *blasée* woman where she herself saw a religion. A woman forgives formal slanders sooner than she forgives the tone in which she is spoken of, and she understood that the accent of George's voice as he pronounced her name was in absolute disagreement with the feelings with which she wished to inspire Hubert. And then, to keep back nothing, she had a past, and George might be acquainted with that past. A shudder passed through her at the mere idea of this.

For these diverse reasons she had employed her shrewdest and most secret diplomacy to part the two cousins from each other. This work was now bearing its fruit, and was the means of inspiring Hubert with unconquerable distrust, while the cab was taking him to the club in the Rue du Cirque.

"In what way," he thought, "can I question George? I cannot say to him: 'I am Madame de Sauve's lover, and you have accused her of having deceived me; prove it to me.'"

The moral impossibility of such a conversation had become a physical one at the moment when the cab stopped in front of the club.

"After all," said Hubert to himself, "I am a very child to trouble myself about what Monsieur George Liauran believes or does not believe."

He dismissed his cab, and instead of entering the club, walked in the direction of the Champs Elysées.

That which constitutes the marvellous essence and the unique charm of love, is that it gathers, as into a bundle, and sets vibrating in unison, the three beings within us, of thought, feeling, and instinct,—the brain, the heart, and all the flesh. But it is also this unison which forms its terrible infirmity. It remains defenceless against the encroachment of physical imagination, and this feebleness appears especially in the birth of jealousy. In this way is explained the monstrous

facility with which suspicion rises in the soul of a man that knows himself loved above all others, if any particulars frame, before his mind's eye, a picture wherein he sees his mistress deceiving him.

To be sure the lover does not believe in the truth of this picture, yet he is none the more able to forget it entirely, and it gives him pain until a proof comes to render the image absurd at every point. But as there enters a great part of physical life into the formation of the picture, the more material the proof is the more complete is the cure. It is exactly what happens to one awaking from a nightmare, when the assault of surrounding sensations comes to dissipate the torturing image which has occasioned the hallucination of the sleeper.

Certainly, for a year past, during which he had been in love with Theresa de Sauve, Hubert had never, even for a minute, doubted a love of which, through a feeling of delicacy that was a creature of prudence, he had never spoken to any one; and even now, after the accusations formulated against her by Count Scilly and Madame Liauran,

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he did not believe her capable of treachery. Nevertheless, these accusations carried a possible reality with them, and while he was going up again again towards the Arc de Triomphe he was pursued by the recollection of the phrases uttered by his godfather and his mother, evoking within him the spectacle of Theresa resigning herself to another man.

It was but a flash, and scarcely had this vision of hideousness occurred to Hubert's mind than it induced a reaction. By a violent effort he drove away the image, which vanished for a few minutes and then reappeared, this time accompanied by a whole train of probative ideas. Hubert suddenly recollected that during the trip to Tourville several of his mistress' letters had been written from day to day in a somewhat changed hand. She seemed to have sat down to her table in great haste to perform her labour of love, as though it were a task to be hurriedly accomplished. Hubert had been pained by this little momentary change, and then he had reproached himself for a tender susceptibility of heart which was like ingratitude.

Yes ; but was it not immediately after this short period of negligent letters that Theresa had left Trouville, under the pretext that the sea air was doing her no good ? Her departure had been decided upon in twenty-four hours. Hubert could again feel the impulse of wondering joy which had been caused him by this sudden return. He had not expected to see his mistress back in Paris before the month of October, and he met her again in the first week of September. The joy of that time was transformed by retrospection into vague anxiety. Had the evident perturbation of the letters written before the departure, and had the departure itself, no connection with the abominable action of which Theresa was accused ? But it was infamous on his part to admit such ideas, even in imagination. He threw back his head, closed his eyes, knit his forehead, and, mustering all his energy of soul, was enabled to drive the suspicion away once more.

He was now in the highest part of the avenue. He felt so tired that he did what was for him an extraordinary action, he looked for a café at

which he might stop and rest. He noticed a little English tavern, hidden in this corner of fashionable Paris, for the use of coachmen and bookmakers. He went in. Two men, with red faces and of sturdy appearance, who looked as though they must be redolent of the stable, were standing before the counter. The shadow of a closing autumn afternoon was gloomily invading this deserted nook.

Facing the bar ran an empty bench, and on a long wooden table lay an English newspaper in several sheets. Here Hubert sat down and ordered a glass of port wine, which he drank mechanically and which had the effect of freshly exciting his strained nerves. The vision came back to him a third time, accompanied by a still greater number of ideas, which automatically grouped themselves into a single body of argument. Theresa had then returned to Paris so speedily, and had repaired to one of their clandestine meetings. But why had she had such a violent fit of sobbing in his very arms? She was often melancholy in her voluptuousness.

The intoxications of love usually ended with her in sad emotion. But how far removed was this frenzy of despair from her habitual, dreamy languor ! Hubert had been almost frightened at it, and then she had answered him :

“ It was so long since I had tasted your kisses ! They are so sweet to me that they pain me. But it is a dear pain,” she had added, drawing him to her heart and cradling him in her arms.

Nevertheless her despair had not entirely disappeared on the following day or during the weeks which ensued, and which she had spent in the neighbourhood of Paris at a country house belonging to one of her friends who was acquainted with Hubert. He had gone there to see her and had found her as silent as ever, and at times almost dull. She had returned to Paris in the same condition, and with her face somewhat altered ; but he had attributed the change to physical uneasiness. A sudden and new association of ideas now caused him to say to himself :

“ What if this were remorse ? Remorse for what ? Why, for her infamy ! ”

He got up, went out of the café, resumed his walk, and shook off this frightful hypothesis.

“Fool that I am,” he thought, “if she had deceived me it would have been because she did not love me, and what motive would she then have to lie to me?”

This objection, which appeared irrefutable to him, drove away the suspicion for a few minutes. Then it came back again as it always does: “But who is this Count de la Croix-Firmin? Has she ever spoken of him to me?” he asked himself.

He searched anxiously through all his recollections, but could not find that this name had ever been uttered by her. Still, if— Suddenly in a hidden corner of his memory he perceived the syllables of the already hateful name. He had seen them printed in a newspaper article on the festivities at Trouville. It was certainly in a Boulevard paper, and in a connection in which he had also remarked his mistress’s name. By what chance did this little fact, in itself insignificant, return to torment him at this moment?

He had a doubt as to his accuracy, and he took a carriage to go to the office of the only paper that he read habitually. He searched through the collection, and laid his hand upon the short paragraph, which he recollected, doubtless, because he had read it several times on Theresa's account. It was the report of a garden party given by a Marchioness de Jussat. Did it merely prove that this Monsieur de la Croix-Firman had been introduced to Madame de Sauve?

"Ah!" exclaimed the poor fellow after these murderous reflections, "am I going to become jealous?"

This represented an insupportable idea to him, for nothing was more contrary to the innate loyalty of his whole nature than distrust. Then he remembered the warm tenderness which she had lavished upon him from the first, and as he had ever since followed the sweet practice of opening up his whole heart to her, he said to himself that he had a sure means of removing this evil vision for ever. He had simply to see Theresa and tell her everything. In the first

place this would warn her of a calumny which she must immediately put down. Then, he felt that a single word coming from the lips of this woman would immediately dissipate every shadow of anxiety in his mind. He entered a post-office and scrawled on the blue paper of a little pneumatic despatch :

“Tuesday, five o’clock.—The lover is sad, and cannot do without his mistress. Wicked persons have been maligning her to him. Who should hear all this, if not the dear confidante of every sorrow and every joy ? Can she come to-morrow, she knows where, at ten o’clock in the morning ? Let her do so, and she shall be loved still more, if that be possible, by her H.L.,—which denotes this closing afternoon: Horrible lassitude.”

It was in this strain of tender childishness that he wrote to her, with the fondness of language wherein passion often dissembles its native violence. He slipped the slender despatch into the box, and was astonished to find himself feeling almost placid again. He had acted, and the presence of the real had driven the vision away.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT the moment when Theresa de Sauve received Hubert's despatch she was preparing to dress for dining out. She immediately countermanded her carriage, and wrote a hasty line, pleading headache as an excuse for absence. She had been seized with trembling and an icy sweat on reading the simple phrases of the blue note. She gave orders that she was not at home, and cowered down in a low chair before her bedroom fire, with her head in her hands.

Since her return from Trouville she had been living in continued agony, and what she had been dreading like death was come. Her darling, whom she had left so perfectly tranquil and cheerful at two o'clock, could not have fallen into the state of mind which she could feel through the graceful childishness of his note, if some catastrophe had not happened. What catastrophe? Theresa guessed it too well.

George Liauran had been told the truth. During the unhappy woman's stay at the seaside there had been enacted in her life one of those secret dreams of infidelity which frequently occur in the lives of women who have once deviated from the straight path. But our actions, however guilty they may be, do not always give the measure of our souls. Madame de Sauve's nature comprised very lofty portions by the side of very low ones, and was a singular mixture of corruption and nobility. She might, indeed, commit abominable faults, but to forgive them in herself, after the happy custom of most women of the same description, that she could not do, and now less than ever after what her passion for Hubert had been to her life for several months.

Ah! her life! her life! It was this that Theresa de Sauve saw in the flickering flames in the fireplace that autumn evening, with her heart racked with apprehension. The whole weight of her former errors, her criminal errors, was now falling upon her heart, and she remembered her state of dull agony when she had met

Hubert. Theresa de Sauve had been endowed by nature with those dispositions which are most fatal to a woman in modern society, unless she marries under rare conditions, or unless maternity saves her from herself by breaking the energies of her physical, and engrossing the fervour of her moral, vitality. She had a romantic heart, while her temperament made her a creature of passion, that is to say, she fostered both dreams of feeling and unconquerable appetites for sensation.

When persons of this kind meet on the threshold of their lives, with a man who satisfies the twofold needs of their nature, there are between them and this man such mysterious festivities of love as poets conceive but never embrace. Where their destiny wills that they shall be delivered, as Theresa had been to her husband, to a man who treats them from the very first like courtesans, who initiates them in deed and thought into the whole science of pleasure, but who has not sufficient poetry to satisfy the other half of their souls, such women necessarily become curiosos, capable of falling into the worst

experiences, and then their sterility even becomes a happiness, for they at least do not transmit that flame of sentimental and sensual life which they have commonly inherited from a mother's error.

It was, in fact, from her mother, who, cold though she was, had been led by weariness and abandonment into guilty misconduct, that Theresa derived her dreamy imagination, while there flowed in her veins the burning blood of her true father, the handsome Count Branciforte. Further, this child of license and infatuation had been brought up without religious principles or bridle of any kind, by Adolphe Lussac, a most immoral man, who was amused by the little girl's vivacity, and had early made her a guest at many dinners, where she heard all that she ought not to have heard, and guessed all that she ought not to have known. Who can calculate the amount of influence over the falls of a woman of twenty-five that is attributable to the conversations listened to or overheard by the young girl in short frocks?

Nevertheless, Theresa, who had married when very young, had had only two intrigues up to the time of her chance meeting with Hubert, and these two amours had caused her such disgust that she had sworn that she would never again fall into the folly of taking a lover. The good resolutions of a woman who has fallen, and who has suffered for her fault, are like the firm intentions of a gambler who has lost two thousand pounds, or a drunkard who has told his secrets during his intoxication. The deep-lying causes which have produced the first adultery continue to subsist after the fault has given the guilty one cruelly to taste of every bitterness.

The woman who takes a lover is not so much attached to this lover as she is to love, and she continues to be still attached to love when the chosen lover has deceived her, until disillusion after disillusion brings her to love pleasure without love, and sometimes pleasure of the most degrading nature. Theresa de Sauve could never descend so far as this, because a sentiment of the ideal persisted within her, too feeble to

counterbalance the fever of the senses, but strong enough to illumine in her own eyes the abyss of her weaknesses. This taciturn woman, through whom there passed at times the tremors of almost brutal desire, was no epicurean, no light and cheerful courtesan of the world.

Conceived amid her mother's remorse, Theresa had a tragic soul. She was capable of depravity, but incapable of that amused forgetfulness which plucks the fleeting hour, and cannot, without effort, recall the first lover's name among all the rest. No; this first lover, this Frederick Suzel, whom George Liauran had justly suspected, could never be thought of by her without causing her thorough nausea by the recollection of the sad motives of her surrender to him. He was a man gay even to buffoonery, and witty even to cynicism, with that sort of wit which is current between the Opera House, Tortoni, and the Café Anglais.

When paying his addresses to Theresa, he had the good sense not to lose himself in the tricks of fashionable flirtations as did his numerous rivals

—a troop of beasts of prey on the scent of a victim. With great skilfulness of language and a certain penetration of vice, he had frankly offered to arrange with her a kind of partnership for pleasure which should be secret, sure, and with no future, and the unfortunate woman had accepted his proposal. Why? Because she was dreadfully dull; because she was carrying off Suzel from one of her friends; because she was greedy for new sensations, and this person, with his dishonouring talk, had about him a sort of strange prestige of libertinism. Of this connection, in which Frederick had at least been faithful to his promise in not seeking to prolong it, Theresa had soon been deeply ashamed, and she had escaped from it as from the galleys.

After a year spent in enduring her remorse, and in feeling herself sullied by all the knowledge of evil that her intimacy with this man had revealed to her, she had thought to find satisfaction for the needs of her heart in the person of Alfred Fanières, one of the most subtle novelists of the day. Did not all the

books of this charming narrator, from his first and only volume of poetry to his last collection of tales, reveal the most minute and tender understanding of the gentle feminine mind? In this second connection, begun with the most intoxicating hope—that, namely, of consoling all the deceptions of an admired artist—Theresa had soon struck upon the implacable barrenness of the inmost nature of the worn-out literary man, in whom there is an absolute divorce between feeling and written expression.

Though undeceived, she nevertheless persisted in remaining this man's mistress, from that reason which causes a woman's second love affair to be the longest of all in coming to a conclusion. She will admit that the first has been a mistake; but the mistake of her marriage and the mistake of her first amour make two; at the third error she acknowledges that the fault in her conduct is due to herself, and not to the circumstances of her life, and this is a cruel confession for secret pride. Then the writer's egotism had manifested itself so harshly,

when he had believed himself sure of her, that the revolt had been too strong, and Theresa had broken with him.

It was during the period of hard distress subsequent to this rupture that she had met Hubert Liauran. From the corner of her solitary hearth, beside which she watched persistently, she could see so very clearly what the discovery of this tender child's heart had been to her. In an existence which had comprised nothing but wounding or disgrace—had not her keenest sorrows been dishonoured beforehand by their cause?—with what delighted emotion had she measured the purity of this young man's heart? What anxiety had she felt, and what a dread of not pleasing him! What a dread, too, knowing that she had pleased him, of being ruined in his thoughts!

How she had trembled lest one of the cruel talkers of society should reveal her past to Hubert! How had she employed all her woman's art to make this love an adorable poem, wherein should be lacking nothing that might enchant a

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soul innocent and new to life! How had she enjoyed his reverence, and how had she allowed it to be prolonged! Ah! when she thought now of those two days at Folkestone she could scarcely believe that they had been real, and that she had had the courage to survive them. She remembered that she had gone with Hubert to the terminus in spite of every consideration of prudence; she had seen him disappear in the direction of London, leaning out of the carriage window to watch her the longer; she had re-entered the rooms which they had both occupied, before herself taking train for Dover, and there she had spent two hours in the grievous loneliness of a soul overwhelmed with simultaneous despair and felicity.

Her soul bent beneath its weight of recollections like a flower overladen with dew. She had there known a complete union between her two natures—an almost passionate vibration of her entire being. She had half forgiven herself the past, excusing herself by saying mentally to Hubert the words which so many women have

said aloud to men jealous of those bygone days which belonged to others: "I did not know you!"

On their subsequent return to Paris, how carefully and piously had she set herself, during the spring and summer, to live in such a way as not to lose his affection for a single minute! She had resumed all the modesty admitted by love that is complete, but is ennobled by the soul. She trembled constantly lest her caresses should be a cause of corruption to this being, so young both in heart and in body, whom she wished to intoxicate without defiling.

Although she was enamoured to distraction, she had desired the meetings in the little abode in the Avenue Friedland to be far between, lest she should not long enough preserve in his eyes her charm of divine novelty. They had not been very numerous—she might have counted them, tasting in thought the distinct sweetness of each—those afternoons when, with all the shutters closed, and with no light, she had again found the delights of the Folkestone time, sunk in her lover's arms,

and dead to everything but the present moment and its intoxication.

She had gone so far in her idolatry of Hubert as to worship Madame Liauran, although she well knew that she was hated by her. She worshipped her for having brought up this son in such an atmosphere of pure and shrinking sensibility. She worshipped her for having kept him for her during the years of adolescence and youth, so delicate, so graceful, so tender, so much her own, so absolutely her own in the past, the present, and the future. For there was loftiness, almost folly, in her pride. She would say to him :

“Yours is beginning and mine is ending. Yes, child, at twenty-six a woman is almost at the end of her youth, and you have so many years before you ! But never, never will you be loved as I love you, and never will you forget me, never, never.” And at other times : “You will marry,” she would say ; “she lives, she breathes, and yet she is not known to me, she who is to take you from me, and who will sleep every night upon your

heart as I did at Folkestone. Ah! must it indeed be that I have met you so late, and that I cannot bind you to my kisses."

And she would encircle his neck with the loosened tresses of her long, black hair. Since she had belonged to him she had again acquired the habit which she had had as a young girl, of dressing her own hair, so that he might handle her beautiful locks. Then when she had dressed them again quite alone, and was attired and veiled, she would come back to him, not wishing to bid him good-bye anywhere but in the room where they had loved each other, and she would understand from the throbbings of Hubert's heart that no sensation told so much upon him as this good-bye kiss which she gave him with nearly cold lips. She would depart a prey to a nameless sadness, but one at least of which she told her lover. For she did not tell him of every sadness.

She was married, and although she had at all times had a room of her own, she was sometimes obliged to receive her husband in it. Alas! it

was all the more necessary because she had a lover. It was a sinister expiation of her passion, and one which she justified on her part by telling herself that she owed as much to Hubert. If she ever became a mother could she fly with him and take from him his whole life? and the pitiless necessity of baleful lies and degrading partitions would thus come to torture her at the height of her happiness. She acquitted herself, nevertheless, since it was for him, her darling, that she lied.

Yes, but what monstrous enigma suddenly reared itself before her? Oh, the cruel, cruel enigma! With this divine love in her heart, how had she been able to do what she had done? For it had been, indeed, herself, and none other — she, with those feet of hers which now were feeling icy cold, with those hands which now were pressing her feverishly-throbbing brow—she, in short, with her whole physical being, who had left for Trouville at the end of the month of July—she, Theresa de Sauve, who had installed herself for the season

in a villa on the hill. Yes, it had been herself. And yet no ! It was not possible that Hubert's mistress had done this. What—this ? Oh, cruel, cruel enigma !

From what depths of the memory of her senses had there issued those strange impulses, those secret, lustful temptations which had commenced to assail her ? But have the senses really a memory ? Can it be that the guilty fevers will not depart for ever from the blood which they have fired in evil hours ?

Once settled in her villa, she had met again with old friends who had been greatly neglected since the beginning of her connection with Hubert. With these women and their admirers—their “fancy men,” as a lady said who mixed in their “set”—she had formed several very cheerful and innocent country parties, and here she was, day by day, beginning, not to love Hubert less, but to live somewhat apart from her love, and to take pleasure anew in habits of masculine familiarities which she had forbidden to herself for a year past. She was so idle in her villa

with no indoor occupation—not even reading. For she had never liked books much, and her connection with Alfred Fanières had disgusted her for ever with the falsity of fine phrases. When she had written lengthily to Hubert, and then briefly to her husband—who, moreover, came to see her every week—it was necessary to beguile the tedious hours; and at times fitful thoughts came to her which she dared not acknowledge to herself. Hankerings after sensations arose within her, and astonished her.

She knew by hearsay that almost all men, however tender they may be, and however dearly loved their mistresses, cannot remain long away from the latter without experiencing irresistible temptations to deceive her with the first girl that they meet. But this was true of men, and not of women. Why, then, did she find herself a prey to this inexplicable agitation, to this thirst for sensual intoxications, of which she had believed herself for ever cured by the influence of her ennobling, her ideal love?

The depraved creature that she had formerly been awoke by degrees. At night, in her sleep, she was haunted by visions of her past. In vain had she striven, and in vain had she cursed her secret perversion.

Then she had allowed herself to listen to the addresses of the young Count de la Croix-Firmin. She remembered with horror the kind of nervous fascination which this man's presence, his smile, and his eyes had exerted upon her. Then—she would fain have died at the recollection of this—one afternoon, when he had come up to see her, and there was a torrid heat, such as makes the will feel itself drooping, he had been venturesome, and she had given herself to him, faintly at first, and then impetuously and madly. For three days she had been his mistress—a prey to the wildness of physical passion—banishing, ever banishing, the recollection of Hubert, feeling herself rolling into a gulf of infamy, and flinging herself still further into it, until the day when she had awakened from this sensual frenzy as from a dream.

She had opened her eyes, measured her shame, and, like a wounded and dying creature, had fled from the accursed spot and from her detested accomplice to return—to what?—and to whom?

A melancholy and heart-breaking return to what had been the restoration of her entire life, to what she had blasted for ever! She had returned to the room of those sweet hours, and she had found Hubert, her Hubert—but could she still call him so?—more tender, more loving, and more loved than before. Alas! alas! had her inexpressible deceit rendered her for ever powerless to taste that of which she was no longer worthy? In the young man's arms, and on his heart, she had remembered the other, and the ecstasy of former times, the delicious and unspeakable swooning in the excess of feeling, had fled from her.

It was then that Hubert had seen her sobbing despairingly, and an immense sadness had come upon her, a death-like torpor, crossed by a cruel anxiety lest some indiscreet speech should reach her lover and awake his suspicions. Her own

reputation she heeded but little ; she was well aware that after acting as she did with La Croix-Firmin, she could count on little but contempt and hatred from him. She also knew what the honour of those men who make it their profession to have women is worth. What tortured her, however, was not a fear lest he might compromise her personal security by speaking. After all, what had she, childless, and rich with an independent fortune, to dread from her husband ?

But a look of distrust in Hubert's eyes was what she felt to be beyond her powers of endurance. Perhaps, nevertheless, it might be better that he should know the frightful truth ? He would drive her from him like an unfortunate ; but at times anything seemed preferable to the torment of having such remorse at her heart, and of lying ceaselessly to so noble a fellow. She had again set herself to love him with desperate frenzy, and, as her revolt against the baser part of her nature hurried her to an extreme in the other or romantic direction, a mad desire came upon her to tell him everything, that at least the

voluntary humiliation of her confession might be, as it were, a ransom for her infamy. And yet, although silence was a very lie, this lie she had still the strength to sustain; but, as for an actual lie, she suffered too much to have the shameful energy for it, if ever he questioned her.

And this questioning she was now about to face; she could read it between the lines of the despatch. Ah! what was she now to do, if she had guessed aright? She had drunk as much of the gall of shame as she could bear. Would she have heart enough still to drink this, the bitterest drop, and once more betray her only love by a fresh deception? If she were frank Hubert must at least esteem her for her frankness, and if she were not how could she endure herself? Yes, but to speak was the death of her happiness.

Alas! had not this been dead ever since her return? Would she ever recover what she had once felt? What was the use of disputing with fate for this mutilated, sullied remnant of a divine dream? And all that night she was bowed beneath

the agony of these thoughts, a poor creature born for all the nobility of a single and faithful love, who had caught a glimpse of her dream and had possessed it, to be then dispossessed of it by the fault of a nature hidden within her, but which, nevertheless, was not her entire self.

CHAPTER IX.

IN the cab which brought her to the Avenue Friedland on the day following this night of agony, Theresa de Sauve took none of the precautions that were habitual with her, such as changing vehicles on the way, tying a double veil across her face, or peeping at the street corners through the little pane of glass behind, to see whether anything of a suspicious nature was accompanying her clandestine drive. All these timorous secrecies of forbidden love used formerly to please her delightfully on Hubert's account. Was not the continuance of their intrigue secured by securing its mysteriousness? There was little question of that now. In her ungloved hand she held a little gold key hanging to the chain of a bracelet—a pretty trinket of tenderness which her lover had had contrived for her. This key, which never left her wrist,

served to open the door of the ground floor lent by Emmanuel Deroy, the worshipped refuge of the few days during which she had really lived her life—a dream-oasis to which the unhappy woman was now going as to a cemetery.

There was likely to be a storm in the course of the day, for the atmosphere of the autumn morning was heavy, and completely charged with a sort of electric torpor, the influence of which irritated still further her weak, womanish nerves. She did not tell the cabman, as she always used to do, to drive into the entry,—for the house had two exits, and the large open gateway allowed her to be brought in the cab to the very door of the apartments without being seen by the porter, whose discretion was, moreover, guaranteed by the profits resulting from the amour of his tenant's friend. She had fastened her eyes the whole way upon the slightest details in the streets successively passed through; she knew them well, from the signs of the shops to the look of the houses, because these images were associated with the happiest memories of her too

short romance. She uttered to them in thought the same mournful farewell as to her happiness.

A prey, too, to the hallucinations of terror, she could no longer distinguish the possible from the real, and she no longer doubted that Hubert knew all. She read again the note which she had received the day before, and every word of which, to her who knew the young man's character so well, betrayed profound anguish. Whence had this anguish come if not from an event relating to their love? And from what event if not from a revelation of the horrible deception, the infamous act committed by her, yes, by herself? Ah! if there were somewhere a lustral water to cleanse the blood, and with it the recollection of all evil fevers! But, no; it continues to course in our veins, this blood, laden with the most shameful sins. There is no interruption between the beating of our pulse in the hour of our remorse and its beating in the hour of our fault. And Theresa could again feel pressing upon her face the kisses of the man with whom she had betrayed Hubert. Yet she had paid back these frightful kisses.

“ Ah! if he questions me, how could I find strength to lie to him, and what would be the use? ”

These words had terminated all her meditations since the day before, and she uttered them to herself again when she found herself in front of the door within which there was doubtless going to be enacted one of the, to her, most tragical scenes in the drama of her life. Her fingers trembled so that she had some trouble in slipping the little gold key into the lock—the key which had been given to be handled with other feelings! She knew, beyond doubt, that at the mere sounding of this key turning on the bolt Hubert would be there behind the door awaiting her.

He was there, in fact, and received her in his arms. He felt her lips to be perfectly cold. He looked at her, as he did on each occasion, after pressing her to him. It seemed as though he wished to persuade himself of the truth of her presence. This first kiss always gave Theresa a spasm at the heart, and it needed all her dread of displeasing her lover to make her release herself

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from his arms. Even at this moment, and in spite of all the tortures of the night before, she thrilled to the very depths of her being, and she was seized with something like a mad desire to intoxicate Hubert with so many endearments that they should both forget—he, what he had to ask, and she, what she had to reply. It was but a quiver, nevertheless, and it died away on simply hearing the young man's voice questioning her with anxiety.

“You are ill?” he said.

Seeing her quite pale, the tender-hearted fellow reproached himself for having brought her there that morning, and, at the sight of her evident suffering, he had already forgotten the motive of their meeting. Moreover, his confidence as to the result of the conversation was such that he had had no renewal of his suspicions since the day before.

“You are ill?” he repeated, drawing her into the next room and making her sit down on a divan.

As Emmanuel Derooy had been attached to the

embassy at Constantinople before going to London, his apartments were adorned throughout with Oriental materials, and this large divan, hung with drapery, and placed just opposite the door of a little garden, was particularly dear to Hubert and Theresa. They had chatted so much among these cushions, with their heads resting unitedly upon them, at those moments of intimacy which follow upon the intoxications of love, and which, by him at least, were preferred to them; for, although he loved Theresa to the point of sacrificing everything for her, he had, nevertheless, at the bottom of his conscience, remained a Catholic, and a dim remorse mingled its secret bitterness with the sweetness that was given him by the kisses. He used to think of his own fault, and especially of the sin which he caused Theresa to commit; for in the simplicity of his heart he imagined that he had seduced her.

She sank rather than sat down on the deep divan, and he began to take off her veil, bonnet, and mantle. She allowed him to do so, smiling at him the while with infinite tenderness. After

her hours of torturing sleeplessness, there was to her something at once very bitter and very affecting in the impress of the young man's coaxing. She found him so affectionate, so delicately intimate, so like himself, that she thought that she had without doubt been mistaken as to the meaning of the note, and, to rid herself immediately of uncertainty, she said, in reply to his question about her health :

"No, I am not ill ; but the tone of your note was so strange that it has made me uneasy."

"My note?" rejoined Hubert, pressing her cold hands, in order to warm them. "Ah ! it was not worth while. Look here, I dare not now acknowledge to you why I wrote it."

"Acknowledge it all the same," she said, with an already anguish-stricken insistence, for Hubert's embarrassment had just brought back to her the anxiety which had caused her so much suffering.

"People are so strange !" replied the young man, shaking his head. "There are times when in spite of themselves they doubt what they

know best. But first you must forgive me beforehand."

"Forgive you, my angel!" she said. "Ah! I love you too well! Forgive you!" she repeated; and these syllables, which she heard her own voice uttering, echoed in an almost intolerable fashion through her conscience. How willingly, indeed, would she have had reason to forgive instead of to be forgiven. "But for what?" she asked, in a lower tone, which revealed the renewal of her inward emotion.

"For having allowed myself to be disturbed for a moment by an infamous calumny which persons who hate our love have repeated to me about your life at Trouville. But what is the matter?"

These words, and still more the tone of voice in which they were uttered, had entered like a blade into Theresa's heart. If Hubert had received her on her arrival with those words of suspicion which men know how to devise, and every word of which implies an absence of faith that anticipates the proofs, she might, perhaps, have

found in her woman's pride sufficient energy to face the suspicion and to deny it.

But from the outset of this explanation, the young man's whole attitude had displayed that kind of tender and candid confidence which imposes sincerity upon every soul that possesses any remnant of nobility; and in spite of her weaknesses, Theresa had not been born for the compromises of adultery, nor, above all, for the complications of treachery. She was one of those creatures who are capable of great impulses of conscience and sudden returns of generosity, and who, after descending to a certain depth, say: "This is debasement enough," and prefer to destroy themselves altogether rather than sink still lower.

Moreover, the remorse of the last few weeks had brought her into that state of suffering sensibility which impels to the most unreasonable acts, provided that these acts bring the suffering to an end. And then the unnerving of the sleepless nights, increased still further by the uneasiness of the stormy day, rendered it as

impossible for her to dissemble her emotions as it is for a panic-stricken soldier to dissemble his fear. At that moment her countenance was literally thrown into confusion by the effect of what she had just been listening to, and by the expectation of what her unconscious tormentor was going to say.

For a minute there was a silence that was more than painful to them both. The young man, seated on the divan by the side of his mistress, was looking at her with drooping eyelids, his mouth half open and his face death-like. The excessiveness of her emotion was so astonishingly significant that all the suspicions which had been raised and banished the day before awoke simultaneously in the mind of the youth. He suddenly saw abysses before him by the lightning-flash of one of those instantaneous intuitions which sometimes illumine the whole brain at times of supreme emotion.

"Theresa!" he cried, terror-stricken by his own vision and by the sudden horror that was seizing upon him. "No, it is not true; it is not possible—"

"What?" she said again; "speak, and I will answer you."

The transition from the tender "thou" of their intimacy to this "you," rendered so humble by her subdued accents, completed Hubert's distraction.

"No!" he went on, rising and beginning to walk about the room with an abrupt step, the sound of which trampled upon the poor woman's heart; "I cannot formulate that—I cannot—well, yes!" he said, stopping in front of her; "I was told that you were the mistress of Count de la Croix-Firmin at Trouville, that it was the talk of the place, that some young men had seen you entering his room and kissing him, that he himself had boasted of having been your lover. That is what I was told, and told with such persistence that for a moment I was maddened by the calumny, and then I felt the morbid longing to see you, to hear you only declare to me that it is not true. Answer, my love, that you forgive me for having doubted you, that you love me, that you have loved me, that all this is nothing but a hateful lie."

He had thrown himself at her feet as he said these words; he took her hands, her arms, her waist; he hung to her as, when drowning, he would have caught at the body of one who had leapt into the water to save him.

"It is true that I love you," she replied, in a scarcely audible voice.

"And all the rest is a lie?" he besought her distractedly.

Ah! he would have given his life at that moment for a word from those lips. But the lips remained mute, and upon the woman's pale cheeks slow, long tears began to flow, without sob or sigh, as though it had been her soul that was weeping thus. Did not such a silence and such tears, at such a moment, form the clearest, the most cruel, of all replies?

"It is true, then?" he asked again.

And as she continued silent: "But answer, answer, answer," he went on, with a frightful violence, which wrung from those lips—at the corners of which the slow tears were still flowing—a "Yes" so feeble that he could

scarcely hear it; and yet he was destined to hear it, for ever!

He leaped up, and cast his eyes wildly around him. Some weapons hung on the walls. A temptation seized upon the soldier's son to mangle this woman with one of those shining blades; and so strong was it that he recoiled. He looked again at that face, upon which the same tears were flowing freely. He uttered that "Ah!" of agony—that cry, as of an animal wounded unto death, which is drawn forth by a sight of horror; and as though he were afraid of everything—of the sight before him—of the walls—of this woman—of himself—he fled from the room and the house, bare-headed and with soul distraught. He had been strong enough to feel that in five minutes he would have become a murderer.

He fled, whither? how? by what routes? He never knew with clearness what he had done that day. On the morrow he recollected, because he had the palpable proof of it before him, that once he had caught sight of his haggard face and wind-

blown hair in the glass of a shop window, and that, with an odd survival of carefulness about his dress, he had entered a shop to buy a hat. Then he had walked straight before him, passing through innumerable Paris districts. Houses succeeded houses indefinitely. At one time he was in the country of the suburbs. The storm burst, and he had been able to take shelter under a railway-bridge. How long did he remain thus? The rain fell in torrents. He was leaning against one of the walls of the bridge. Trains passed at intervals, shaking all the stones.

The rain ceased. He resumed his walk, splashing through the puddles of water, without food since the morning, and heedless of his fast. The automatic movement of his body was necessary to him that he might not founder in madness, and instinctively he walked on. The monstrous thing which he had perceived through the shock of a terrible dread was there before his eyes; he could see it; he knew it to be real, and he did not understand it. He was like a crushed man. He experienced a sensation so intolerable that it

had even ceased to be pain, with such completeness did it suppress the powers of his being and overwhelm them. Evening was coming on. He found himself again on the road towards home, guided to it by the mechanical impulse which brings back the bleeding animal in the direction of its den. About ten o'clock he rang at the door of the house in the Rue Vaneau.

"Nothing has happened to you, sir?" asked the doorkeeper; "the ladies were so anxious——"

"Let them know that I have come in," said the young man, "but that I am unwell and wish to be alone, absolutely alone, Firmin; you understand."

The tone in which these words were uttered cut short all questions on the lips of the old servant. He followed Hubert, apparently dazed by the furious lightning which he had just perceived in the eyes of his young master and by the disorder of his dress. He saw him cross the hall and enter the pavilion, and went up himself to the drawing-room to give his mistress the strange message with which he was charged. The mother had expected her son at luncheon.

Hubert had not come in. Although he had never before failed to appear without giving her notice, she had striven not to be too anxious about it. The afternoon passed without news, and then the dinner-hour struck. Still no news.

"Mamma," Madame Liauran said to Madame Castel, "some misfortune has happened. Who can tell whither despair has led him?"

"He has been detained by friends," the old lady replied, concealing her own in order to control her daughter's anxiety.

When the door opened at ten o'clock, Madame Liauran, with her quickness of hearing, caught the sound from the furthest end of the drawing-room, and said to her mother and to Count Scilly, who had been informed since dinner; "It is Hubert."

When Firmin repeated the young man's words the invalid exclaimed: "I must speak to him."

And she sat upright, as though forgetting that she was no longer able to walk.

"The Count will go to him," said Madame Castel, "and bring him back to us."

At the end of ten minutes Scilly returned, but alone. He had knocked at the door, and then tried to open it. It was double-locked. He had called Hubert several times, and the latter at last entreated him to leave him.

"And not a word for us?" asked Madame Liauran.

"Not a word," replied the General.

"What have we done?" rejoined the mother. "What good will it do me to have separated him from this woman if I have lost his heart?"

"To-morrow," replied Scilly, "you will see him returning to you more tender than ever. Just at first, it is too much for you. He has been seeking proofs for what we have told him, and he has found them. This is the explanation of his absence and his behaviour."

"And he has not come to grieve with me!" said the mother. "Alas! can it be that I have loved him for myself alone, while believing that I loved him for his own sake? Will you ring, General, for them to take me to my room?"

And when the easy chair, which she never left

now, had been wheeled into the next room, and she was in bed :

“Mamma,” she said to Madame Castel, “draw back the curtain that I may look at his windows.”

Then, as Hubert had not closed his shutters, and his shadow could be seen passing to and fro, “Ah ! mamma,” she said again, “why do children grow up ? Formerly, he never had a trouble that he did not come and cry over it on my shoulder, as I do on yours, and now——”

“Now he is as unreasonable as his mother,” said the old lady, who had scarcely spoken during the whole evening, and who, printing a kiss upon her daughter’s hair, silenced her by letting fall these words, which revealed her own martyrdom : “My heart aches for you both.”

CHAPTER X.

IN the morning, when Madame Liauran sent to ask for her son, the latter replied that he would be down for luncheon. He appeared, in fact, at noon. His mother and he exchanged merely a look, and she at once understood the extent of the suffering which he had undergone, simply by the kind of shiver with which he was affected on seeing her again. She was associated with this suffering as its occasion, if not its cause, and he could never forget the fact. His eyes had something so particularly distant in them, and his mouth so close a curve of lip, his whole face was so expressive of a determination to permit no explanation of any kind, that neither Madame Liauran nor Madame Castel ventured to question him.

For a year past these three persons had had many silent meals in the antequely-wainscoted

dining-room—an apartment so spacious as to make the round table placed in the centre appear small. But all three had never been sensible of an impression, as they were on this day, that, even when speaking to one another, there would henceforth be a silence between them impossible to break, something which could not be put into words, and which, for a very long time, would create a background of muteness, even behind their most cordial expansions.

After luncheon, when Hubert, who had scarcely touched the various dishes, took the handle of the door, in order to leave the little drawing-room in which he had remained for scarcely five minutes, his mother felt a timid and almost repentant desire to ask his forgiveness for the pain that she read on his taciturn countenance.

“Hubert?” she said.

“Mamma?” he replied, turning round.

“You feel quite well to-day?” she asked.

“Quite well,” he replied in a blank tone, such a tone as immediately suppresses all possibility of conversation; and he added: “I shall be punctual at dinner-time this evening.”

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The young man was now singularly pre-occupied. After a night of torture, so continuously keen that he could not remember having ever undergone anything like it, he had become master of himself again. He had passed through the first crisis of his grief, a crisis after which a man ceases to die from despair, because he has really reached the deepest depth of sorrow. Then he had recovered that momentary calm which follows upon prodigious deperditions of nervous energy, and had been able to think. It was then that he had been seized with anxiety respecting Madame de Sauve—an anxiety which was devoid of tenderness, for at this moment, after the assault of grief which he had just sustained, his soul was dried up, his inward lethargy was absolute, all capacity for feeling was gone.

But he had suddenly remembered that he had left Theresa in the little ground floor apartment in Avenue Friedland, and his imagination dared not form any conjectures upon what had taken place after his departure. It was just at the

end of luncheon that this thought had assailed him, and, over and above his main sorrow, it had immediately caused him a shiver of nervous terror—the only emotion of which he was capable.

He went straight from the Rue Vaneau to the Avenue, and when he found himself in front of the house he dared not enter, although he had the key in his hand. He called the doorkeeper, an ugly individual to whom he could never speak without repugnance, so hateful to him was his brazen, glabrous face, his servile and, at the same time, insolent eye, and the tone which he assumed as a generously-paid accomplice.

“I beg a thousand pardons, sir,” said this man, even before Hubert had questioned him. “I did not know that the lady was still there. I had seen you go out, sir, and in the afternoon I went in to give a look round the place, as I do every day, and found the lady sitting on the sofa. She seemed to be in great pain. Is she better to-day, sir?” he added.

“She is very well,” replied Hubert, and as he

suddenly felt a strong repugnance to entering the apartments, and on the other hand wished at all costs to avoid giving this man, for whom he had such an antipathy, any grounds for suspecting the drama in his life, he replied, "I have come to settle your bill. I am going on a journey."

"But you have already paid me, sir, at the beginning of the month," said the other.

"I may be away for a long time," said Hubert, drawing a bank-note from his pocket-book. "You will put this down to the account."

"You are not coming in, sir?" resumed the doorkeeper.

"No," said Hubert, and he went away, saying to himself, "I am a simpleton. Women of that sort don't kill themselves!"

Women of that sort! The phrase, which had occurred naturally to him, the youth hitherto so ingenuous, so gentle, and so refined, was a fitting translation of the kind of feeling which now held the ascendancy over him, and which lasted for several days. It was a boundless disgust, a thorough nausea; but so complete and so profound

was it, that it left no room in his heart for anything else. He could not even have told whether he was suffering, so entirely did contempt absorb all the living energies of his being.

He perceived the woman whom he had idolised so religiously and with so noble a fervour, plunged, as it were, and wallowing in such an abyss of uncleanness, that he felt as though by loving her he had himself been rolling in the mire. This was the physical sight of which he was now the victim from one end of the day to the other, and to such a degree that he was unable to interpret it or form any hypothesis concerning Theresa's character. The sight of it was inflicted upon him with a material exactness which bordered on hallucination. Yes, he could see the act, and the act alone, without having strength enough to shake off the hideous, besetting fellowship. It paralysed him with horror, and he could think of nothing else.

A sort of unbroken mirage showed him the abominable pollution of his mistress's prostitution, and, just as a man attacked by jaundice

looks at all objects through bile-infected eyes, so it was, through his disgust, that he viewed the whole of life. His soul was as though saturated with bitterness, and yet was frightfully dry. There was not an impression that was not transformed in him into this perception of foulness and melancholy.

He rose, and spent the morning among his books, opening but not reading them. He lunched, and the sight of his mother irritated instead of softening him. He went back to his room, and resumed the dull idleness of the morning. He dined, and then, immediately after dinner, left the drawing-room, so as not to encounter either the General or his cousin, whose presence was intolerable to him.

At night he lay awake, continuing to see the accursed scene with the same impossibility of arriving at relaxation of grief. If he fell asleep, he had every second time to endure the nightmare of this same vision. As he had no conception of the physiognomy of the man with whom his mistress had deceived him, there rose up in

his morbid sleep horrible dreams wherein all kinds of different faces were mingled together. The distress which such imagining caused him would awake him. His body would be bathed in sweat, he could feel a rending of the bosom as though his quick-beating heart were about to leave its place, and with this suffering there was, as before, such complete prostration of his affectionate powers, that he was not even anxious to know what had become of Theresa.

"After all," he said to himself one morning as he was getting up, "I lived well enough before I knew her! I have only to put myself again in thought into the condition in which I was before that 12th of October." He had an exact recollection of the date. "It was scarcely more than a year ago; I was so tranquil then! I have had an evil dream, that is all. But I must destroy everything that might bring back the memory of it to me."

He sat down before his writing table after putting fresh wood upon the fire to increase the blaze, and double-locking the door. Involuntarily,

he recollected that he used so to act formerly, when he wished to see the precious treasure of his love-relics again. He opened the drawer in which the treasure was hidden: it consisted of a black morocco box, on which were entwined two initial letters—a “T.” and an “H.” Theresa and he had exchanged two of these boxes, to keep their letters in them. Upon the one which he had given to his mistress he had caused Theresa’s name to be autographed in full, instead of the two initials.

“What a child I was!” he thought, as he recollected the thousand little weaknesses of this order in which he had indulged. There is always puerility, indeed, in extreme weaknesses; but it is on the day when we are on the road to hardness of heart that we think so.

Beside this box lay two objects which Hubert had thrown there on the evening of the same day on which he had learnt his mistress’s treachery: one was his ring, and the other a slender gold chain, to which hung a tiny key. He took the little hoop in his hand, and, in

spite of himself, looked at the inner surface. Theresa had had a star engraved there, with the date of their stay at Folkestone. This simple token suddenly called up before Hubert an indefinite perspective of reminiscences; he could again see the door of the hotel, the staircase with its red carpet, the drawing-room in which they had dined, and the waiter who had waited on them, with his face of Britannic respectability, his shaven lip, and his over-long chin. He could hear him say: "I beg your pardon," and Theresa's smile appeared before him. What languishment swam then in her eyes—those eyes, whose green-grey shade was at such moments completely liquid—completely bathed with an entire abandonment of the inmost nature!—those eyes, wherein slumbered a sleep which seemed to invite you to be its dream!

Hubert mechanically slipped the ring upon his finger, and then flung it almost angrily into the drawer, causing the metal to rebound against the wood. To open the box it was necessary to

handle the chain. It was an old chain which he had from Theresa. He had given her the bracelet with the key of the apartments attached to it, and she had given him this chainlet that he might carry the key of the box at his neck. He had worn this scapulary of love for months and months, and often had he felt beneath his shirt for the tiny trinket to hurt himself a little by pressing it against his breast, and thus remind himself of the tender mystery of his dear happiness.

How far away to-day was all this intoxication, ah! how far and how lost in the abyss of the past, whence there issues so frightful an odour of death! When he had raised the lid of the box he leaned upon his elbow, and, with his forehead in his hand, gazed upon what was left of his happiness, the few nothings so perfectly insignificant to anyone else, but so full of soul to him: an embroidered handkerchief, a glove, a veil, a bundle of letters, a bundle of little blue notes, placed within one another, and forming as it were a tiny book of tenderness. And the

envelopes of the letters had been opened so carefully, and the paper of the blue notes torn with such precision. The slightest details reminded Hubert of the scruples of loving piety which he had felt for everything that came from his mistress.

Beneath the letters and blue notes there was still a likeness of her, representing her in the costume which she had worn at Folkestone: a plain, close-fitting cloth jacket, and a projecting hat which cast a slight shadow upon the upper part of the face. She had had this portrait taken for Hubert alone, and, when giving it, she had said to him:

“I thought so much of ourselves while I was sitting. If you knew how much this likeness loves you!”

And Hubert felt himself really loved by it. It seemed to him that from the oval face, the slender lips, and the dream-bathed eyes, there proceeded a tender effluence which encompassed him, and it was there that, by the side of the vision of perfidy, there began to rise afresh the

vision of Theresa's love. He knew as clearly from the memories of this woman that she had loved, and still loved him, as he knew from her own confession that she had betrayed him. He saw her again as he had left her on the sofa in their retreat, with her face convulsed, and, above all, her tears—ah, what tears! For the first time since the fatal hour he perceived the nobility with which she had acknowledged her fault, when it was so easy for her to speak falsely, and he suddenly uttered a cry which hitherto had not come to him through his days of parched and passionate pain :

“ But why? why?”

Yes, why? why? This anguish of a completely moral order henceforward accompanied the anguish of physical sight. Hubert began to think, not only about his trouble, but about the cause of his trouble. To burn these letters, to tear this likeness, to break and throw away the chain and ring, to destroy this last remnant of his love, would have been as impossible to him as to rend with steel his mistress's quivering

body. These objects were living persons with looks, caresses, pantings, voices. He closed the drawer, unable any longer to endure the presence of these things which to him seemed made of the very substance of his heart.

He threw himself upon the couch and lost himself in the gulf of his reflection. Yes, Theresa had loved him, and Theresa loved him still. There are tears, embraces, and a warmth of soul which do not lie. She loved him and she had betrayed him! With his own name in her heart she had given herself to another, less than six weeks after leaving him! But why? why? Driven by what force? Led away by what dizziness? Overwhelmed by what intoxication? What was the nature—not of women of that sort now, for he had no longer any such fierceness of thought—but of woman, that so monstrous an action should be barely possible to her? Of what flesh was she formed, this deceiving creature, that with all the appearances and all the realities of love, it was not possible to place more reliance upon her than upon water.

How soft they were, those woman's hands, and how loyal they seemed! but to entrust one's heart to them, believing in a mutual affection, was the most foolish of follies! She smiles upon you, and weeps for you, and already she has noticed a passer-by, to whom, if he amuse her for an hour, she will sacrifice all your tenderness, with flame in her eyes and grace on her lips! Ah! why? why? Yet what truth can there be in the world if even love is not true? And what love? Hubert was now thoroughly investigating his past; he conscientiously examined his attachment to Theresa, and he did himself the justice to acknowledge that for months past he had not had a thought that was not for her. He had certainly made mistakes, but they had always been for her, and even at this hour he could not repent them.

He would have found relief for all his pain in kneeling before the priest who had trained him, and saying: "Father, I have sinned." But no; it was beyond his power to regret the actions in which Theresa, his Theresa, had been involved.

Yes, he had idolised her with unswerving fervour, and it was his first love, and it would be the last, or at least he thought so, and he had shown her his confidence in the continuance of their feelings with incalculable ingenuousness. Nothing of all this had had sufficient influence over her to arrest her at the moment when she committed her infamy,—with the same body.

He could suddenly breathe its aroma, and again feel its impression over his whole being; then there was a resurrection of jealousy, painful even to torture, and continually he harped on the “why? why?”—in despair, and pitiful, like so many before him, from clashing against the unanswerable riddle of a woman’s soul, guilty once, guilty again, guilty even to her grey hairs and to her death itself.

This new form of grief lasted for days and days afterwards. The young man was giving free rein within himself to a new feeling of which he had never had a suspicion hitherto, and which he was henceforward to endure continually—mistrust. From his earliest years he had lived with a

complete faith in the appearances which surrounded him. He had believed in his mother. He had believed in God. He had believed in the sincerity of every word and caress. Above all, he had believed in Theresa de Sauve. He had assimilated her in thought with the rest of his life. All was truth around him; thus Theresa's love had appealed to him as a supreme truth, and now, by a mental revolution which betrayed the primitive flaw in his education, he was assimilating all the rest of his life with this woman of falsehood.

His mother had accustomed him to have nothing to say to scepticism. This is probably the surest method of causing the first deception to transform the too implicit believer into an absolute negator. It is never well to expect much from men or from nature, for the former are wild animals scantily masked with decorum; while, as for the latter, her apparent harmony is the result of an injustice which knows no remission. To preserve the ideal within us until death at last releases us from the dangerous slavery to others

and to ourselves, we must early habituate ourselves to regard the universe of moral beauty as the opium-smoker regards the dreams of his intoxication. Their charm consists in the fact that they are dreams, and consequently correspond to nothing that is real.

Hubert, quite on the contrary, was so accustomed to move his intellect in one piece that he was unable to doubt or to believe by halves. If Theresa had lied to him why should not everyone do the same? This idea did not frame itself in an abstract form, nor did he arrive at it by the aid of reasoning: it was the substitution of one mode of feeling for another. During this cruel period he found himself suspecting Theresa in their common past.

He asked himself whether her betrayal at Trouville had been the first, whether she had not had another lover than himself at the time of their most infatuated passion. This woman's perfidy was corrupting his very recollections. It was doing worse. Under this misanthropical influence he committed the greatest of moral

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crimes: he doubted his mother's tenderness. Yes, in Madame Liauran's passionate affection the unhappy fellow could see nothing but jealous egotism.

"If she really loved me," he said to himself, "she would not have told me what she did."

Thus, he found himself in that state of feeling to which popular language has given the expressive name of disenchantment. He had seen the last of the beauty of the human soul, and he was beginning to prove its misery, and always he fell back upon this question as upon the point of a sword :

"But why? why?"

And he sifted Theresa's character without meeting with any reply. He might as well have asked why Theresa had senses as well as a heart, and why at certain times there was set up, as with men, a divorce between the longings of her heart and the tyranny of her senses. Those debauchees in whom libertinism has not killed sentimentality know the secret of these divorces; but Hubert was not a

debauchee. He must remain pure even in his despair, and it never occurred to him to seek forgetfulness of his trouble in the intoxication of loveless kisses. He was still ignorant of venal and consoling alcoves—where men lose indeed their regrets, but at the cost of losing their dreams.

And yet, since he was young, and since, in his intimacy with Theresa, he had made a habit of the most ardent pleasure—pleasure which exalts both mind and body in divine communion—he began, after some weeks of these sorrows and reflections, to feel a dim desire, an unacknowledged appetite for this woman of whom he wished to know nothing more, whom he must regard as dead, and whom he so utterly despised.

This strange and unconscious return towards the delights of his love, but a return no longer ennobled by any ideal, manifested itself in a curiosity such as those are which issue from the unfathomable depths of our being. He felt a sickly longing to see with his own eyes this man who had been Theresa's lover, this La Croix-

Firmin, to whom his mistress had given herself, and in whose arms she had quivered with voluptuousness as in his own. To a spiritual director who had traced, period by period, the ravage wrought in this soul by the corrupt leaven inoculated by Theresa's betrayal, such curiosity would doubtless have appeared the most decisive symptom of a metamorphosis in this youth who had grown up amid all modesty. Was it not the transition from that absolute horror of evil which is the torment and glory of virgin natures, to that kind of still more frightful attraction which borders so closely upon depravity?

But it was especially that frightful facility of imagination about the impurity of a desired woman, which, by one of the saddest laws of our nature, brings it to pass that proof of infidelity, while degrading the lover, and dishonouring the mistress, so frequently kindles love. It is probable that, in such cases, the conception of the perfidy acts like an infamous picture, and that this is the explanation of those fits of sensuality which occur amid the hatred felt, and

which astonish the moralist in certain law-suits founded upon the dramas of jealousy.

Poor Hubert was certainly not one to harbour such base instincts; and yet his curiosity to become acquainted with his Trouville rival was already a very unhealthy one. Its nature was the same as that of Theresa's fault. It is the obscure, indestructible recollection of the flesh which operates without the knowledge of the being who is under its influence. The memory of all the caresses given and received since the night at Folkestone counted for something in this desire to feast his eyes on the real existence of the hated man. It became something so sharp and severe that after struggling for a long time, and with the feeling that he was lowering himself strangely, Hubert could resist no longer, and he employed the following almost childish procedure, for the realisation of his singular desire.

He calculated that La Croix-Firmin must belong to a fashionable club, and it was not long before he had discovered his name and address

in the year-book of such a one. It was to this club that he had recourse in order to ascertain whether the individual in question was in Paris. The reply was in the affirmative. Hubert reconnoitred the Rue La Peyrouse, in which his rival lived, and he immediately satisfied himself that by standing on the footpath of one of the Places intersected by this street, he could watch the house, which was one of two stories in height, and which certainly contained but a very small number of tenants.

He had said to himself that he would take up a position there one morning, and wait until he saw some man come out who appeared to be he whom he sought. He would then question the porter, under some pretext or other, and would, doubtless, thus receive information. It was a method of primitive simplicity, and one in which all those who in their youth have had a passionate adoration for some celebrated writer will recognise the ingenueness of the stratagems which they employed to see their hero. If this plan failed, Hubert

could fall back upon an application to one of those whom he knew among the members of the club; but he felt a great repugnance to taking such a step.

Accordingly he found himself on the spot at nine o'clock one cold December morning. The weather was dry and clear, the sky of a pale blue, and the half-fashionable, half-exotic quarter given over to the traffic of its crowd of tradesmen and grooms. Hubert saw emerge successively from the house which he was examining, some servants, an old lady, a little boy followed by an abbé, and finally, at about half-past eleven, a man who was still young, of medium height, fashionably dressed, slender and strong in his otter-lined overcoat.

This man was just buttoning up his collar as he proceeded straight in Hubert's direction. The latter also advanced, and brushed past the stranger. He saw a somewhat heavy profile, a moustache of the colour of burnished gold, a complexion already coloured by the cold, and the dull eye of a hard liver who has gone late to

bed, after a night spent at the gaming table or elsewhere. An inexpressible pain at his heart caused the jealous lover to hasten to the house.

"Monsieur de la Croix-Firmin?" he asked.

"The Count is not at home," replied the door-keeper.

"But he made an appointment with me for half-past eleven, and I am punctual," said Hubert, drawing out his watch; "has he long gone out?"

"No, sir; you ought to have met him. The Count was here five minutes ago; he cannot have turned the corner."

Hubert had learnt what he wanted. He hurried in the direction of the place where he had passed La Croix-Firmin, and, after a few paces he saw him again, about to follow the footpath of the Avenue towards the Arc de Triomphe. It was he, then! Hubert followed him slowly at a little distance, and watched him with a sort of devouring anguish. He saw him walking daintily along, with a liteness that was at once refined and strong. He remembered

what had taken place at Trouville, and every one of La Croix-Firmin's movements revived the physical vision.

Hubert compared himself mentally, frail and slight as he was, with the sturdy, haughty fellow, who, half a head taller than himself, was thus passing along beneath the beautiful sky of this winter's morning, with a step which spoke the certainty of strength, and holding his stick by the middle, in the English fashion, at some distance from his body. The comparison sufficiently explained the determining cause of Theresa's fault, and for the first time the young man perceived those deadly causes in their genuine brutishness. "Ah! the why! The why! There it is!" he thought, as, with painful envy, he observed this man's animal energy. His first emotion was too bitter for him, and the unhappy fellow was about to give up his pursuit when he saw La Croix-Firmin get into a cab. He hailed one himself.

"Follow that vehicle," he said to the driver.

The thought that his enemy was going to see

Theresa had just restored all Hubert's frenzy. From time to time he leaned out of the window of his four-wheeler, and could see the one which conveyed his rival driving along. This cab, which was of a yellow colour, went down the Champs Elysées, passed along the Rue Royale, entered the Rue Saint Honoré, and then stopped in front of the Café-Voisin. La Croix-Firmin was merely going out to breakfast. Hubert could not repress a smile at the pitiful result of his curiosity. Mechanically he also entered the café. The young Count was already seated at a table with two friends, who had been waiting for him.

At the other extremity of the hall there was a single table unoccupied, at which Hubert placed himself. From here he was able, not, indeed, to hear the conversation of the three guests—the noise in the restaurant was too loud for that—but to study the physiognomy of the man whom he detested. He ordered his own meal at random, and sank into a kind of analysis known to those observers from taste or by profession, who will enter a theatre, a smoking-room, or a railway

carriage with the sole desire of observing the workings of human physiology, and of tracing the instinctive manifestations of temperament in gesture, look, sound of breathing, or posture. It sometimes happened, indeed, that a raising of the voice would cause a fragmentary sentence to reach Hubert ; but he paid no heed to it, sunk as he was in the contemplation of the man himself, whom he saw almost in front of him, with his bold eyes, his rather short neck, and his strong jaws.

When La Croix-Firmin had entered, his complexion had looked worn and pimply ; but when breakfast was half over the work of digestion began to send an influx of blood into his face. He ate much and steadily, with potent slowness. He laughed loudly. His hands, holding his knife and fork, were strong, and displayed two rings. His forehead, which was shown in all its narrowness by his short curls, could never have been lit up by a flame of thought. All this formed a whole which, even in Hubert's hostile eyes, was not devoid of a manly, healthy beauty ; but it

was the brutish beauty of a being of flesh and blood, as to whom it was impossible for a person of refinement to entertain an illusion for an hour. To say of a woman that she had given herself to this man was to say that she had yielded to an instinct of a wholly physical order.

The more Hubert identified himself by observation with this temperament, the clearer did this become to him. He was interpreting Theresa's nature better at this moment than he had ever done before. He grasped its ambiguousness with frightful certainty, and it was then that there rose up within him the saddest, but at the same time the noblest, feeling that he had entertained since his accident, the only one truly worthy of what his soul had formerly been, that one which, in the presence of woman's perfidy, is man's preservation from complete ruin of heart:—pity.

An emotion of infinite bitterness and melancholy combined came upon him at the thought that the charming creature whom he had known, his dear silent one, as he used to call her, she

who had shown herself possessed of such delicate refinement in the art of pleasing him, should have surrendered herself to the caresses of this man.

He suddenly recollected the tears of the night at Folkestone, and the tears, also, at their last interview; and, as though he had at last understood their meaning, he could find within him but a single utterance, which he whispered there in the restaurant filled with the smoke of cigars, then beneath the leafless trees of the Tuileries, then in the solitude of his own room in the Rue Vaneau—a single utterance, but one filled with the perception of the degrading fatalities of his life:

“What misery! My God, what misery!”

CHAPTER XI.

What was Theresa doing while he was suffering thus, and why did she afford him no sign of her existence? Although the young man had forbidden himself to think about her, he thought of her nevertheless, and this question came to add anxiety to his other anguish. Contradictory hypotheses passed in turns through his mind. Had Theresa died of remorse? Had she ceased to love him? Had she kept La Croix-Firmin for her lover? Was she pursuing a fresh intrigue. Everything seemed possible to Hubert, the worst as well as the best, on the part of this woman whom he had learned to be so strangely compounded of refinement and libertinism, of treachery and nobility. He then ascertained by the heart-burning caused him by some of his hypotheses,

by what living fibres he still clung to this being from whom he wished himself released.

He was on the point of taking some steps in order at least to learn what the inclinations of her own soul were at that moment; then he despised himself for the weakness, and, to strengthen himself, he repeated some verses which were in correspondence with his condition of mind. He found them, by a strange irony of destiny which he did not suspect, in the single collection of poetry by Alfred Fanières. This volume, which had been reprinted after the poet's novels had made him celebrated, bore a title which was in itself a revelation of youthfulness: "Early Pride." Hubert had dined, in company with the writer, at Madame de Sauve's house without suspecting what the poor woman felt at being obliged by her husband to receive at her table the lover whom she idolised and the man with whom she had broken. Fanières had talked cleverly that evening, and it was after that dinner that the young man, with very natural curiosity, had obtained the book of verse at a bookseller's.

The poem which pleased him just now was a sonnet, somewhat pretentiously called "Tender Cruelty"—

"Be still, my heart, but speak thou forth fierce pride,
And tell me that my sway no share must know,
Nor can I pardon her the grievous blow
Who knew another's couch although my bride.
At least, I've seen her as she vainly tried,
Her soul in tears dissolved, and crouching low,
To find the look my eyes could yet forego;
And, kingly silent, I have turned aside.
She knew not that, when grief distraught, were heard
Her plaintive tones entreat a single word,
I suffered even as she, and loved her still.
In silence only, outraged man is strong;
For vengeance tells a tale of secret ill,
And I would be believed above all wrong."

"Yes," said Hubert to himself, "he is right : silence—"

The verses moved him childishly, as happens with ordinary readers of poetry, who require a literary work merely to excite or to soothe the inward wound.

"Silence . . ." he resumed. "Do we speak to one that is dead? Well, Theresa is dead to me."

Thus expressing himself in the solitude of his study, where he now spent nearly all his days,

Hubert had no ill-will remaining against his mistress. As no new fact came to rouse fresh feelings within him, the old ones, which had existed before the betrayal, reappeared. The images of his remembrances abounded within him, nor did he drive them away, and under their influence his anger little by little became something abstract, rational, and, so to speak, expedient in his eyes; but in reality he had never loved this woman so much as he did now when he believed himself sure of never seeing her again.

He loved her, in fact, as though she were dead; but who does not know that is the most indestructible and frantic tenderness? When irrevocable separation has not primarily resulted in the killing of love, it exalts it on the contrary in a strange fashion. Impossible to embrace, so present and so far away, the dim shape of the wished-for phantom hovers before our gaze with the beauty that life will never wither more, and our whole soul goes out sadly and passionately to meet it. The duration of days is annihilated. The

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sweetness of the past flows back in its fulness within us, and then begins a singular and retrospective kind of enchantment which is like hallucination in the heart.

Theresa de Sauve might have been a woman buried, sewn up in a shroud, laid in the coldness of the funeral vault for ever, and Hubert would not have abandoned himself more to the gnawings of his memory, to the mad ardour of love which lacks both hope and desire, and is wholly made up of ecstasy of what once has been,—and can never be again. By means of her notes, which he had kept, and which he re-read until he knew every word by heart, he reconstructed, hour by hour, the delicious months of his past intoxication. Theresa was in the habit of never dating her letters, but of simply writing the name of the day at the head of them, "Thursday," "Wednesday," "Saturday." Hubert found the day of the month from the post-mark, thanks to the pious care with which he had preserved all the envelopes, for the childish reason that he could not have destroyed a line of that handwriting without pain.

Even after so many weeks, he had failed to become insensible to the emotion caused him by the sight of the letters of his name traced by Theresa's hand. Yes; hour by hour he revived the life already lived. The charm of the by-gone moments reappeared so complete, so rapturous, so heart-breaking! It had passed away as everything does, and the young man had come to rebel no longer against the enigma of which he was the victim. The Christian notion of responsibility was succeeded within him by an obscure fatalism. The termination of his happiness was now explained in his eyes by the inevitable misery of mankind. He almost acquitted his phantom of a fault which seemed to him to be bound up with natural fatalities; and then he began to think that this phantom was not that of a dead woman with closed eyes, motionless bosom, and shut lips, but of a living creature with beating eye-lids, throbbing heart, and parted lips that were fresh and warm; and, tormented in spite of himself by some vague, dim desire, he again began to murmur:

“ What is she doing? ”

What then was Theresa doing, and how was it that she had essayed no effort to see again the man she loved? What thoughts and what feelings had she experienced since the terrible scene which had separated her from Hubert? With her, too, days had succeeded to days, but while the young man, a prey to a metamorphosis of soul provoked by the most unlooked-for and tragic of deceptions, suffered these rapid burning days to slip away as he passed from one extremity of the universe of feeling to the other, she, the guilty one, the vanquished one, was absorbed in a single thought. Herein like all women who love, she would have given her blood-drops, one after another, to cure the sorrow that she had caused to her lover. It was not that the visible details of her life were modified. Except for the first week, during which she had been overthrown, so to speak, by a continuous and shooting headache, she had, as the result of a reaction from the experience of so many emotions, resumed her vocation as a woman of

fashion, her accustomed course of drives and visits, great dinners and receptions, theatre-goings or evening parties.

But this completely external movement has never been able to hinder dreams any more than the employment of the needle does in fancy work. Though a strange fact at first sight, the explanation in the Avenue Friedland had been followed by a half-soothed relaxation in her soul, simply because voluntary confession had lessened remorse, as it always does. It is, too, on this unexplained law of our consciousness that the subtle psychology of the Catholic Church has based the principle of confession. If Theresa did not altogether forgive herself for her fault, she was, at least, no longer compelled by her thoughts of it to endure the contemplation of absolute baseness. The notion of a certain moral loftiness was now associated with it, ennobling it in her own eyes. This sleep of remorse left her free to absorb herself in the remembrance of Hubert.

She now lived in a condition of deadly anxiety

concerning him, and was dominated by a steady longing to see him again, not that she hoped to obtain her forgiveness from him, but she knew that he was unhappy, and she felt within her such a love for the youth whom she had wounded, that she would willingly have found means to dress and close the sore. How? She could not have told that; but it was not possible that such great, deeply-repentant tenderness could be inefficacious. In any case she must, at least, show Hubert the scope of the passion which she felt for him. Could this fail to touch him, to move him, to rescue him from despair? Now that she was no longer beneath the immediate burden of her infidelity, she did not judge of it from the essentially masculine standpoint, that is, as being something absolute and irreparable.

In woman, who is a creature much more instinctive than we men, and much closer to nature, the energies of renewing spring-time are much more unimpaired. A woman who is deceived forgives, provided that she knows herself to be loved, and

a woman who has deceived can scarcely understand non-forgiveness provided that she loves. The fault committed is an idea, a shadow, a chimera. The love felt is a fact, a reality. Thus Theresa had entirely emerged from the period of moral depression, the extreme limit of which had been marked by her confession. Certainly, she did not regret the latter, as so many other women would have done in like circumstances ; but it was her longing, her hope, her wish that it should not have marked the end of her happiness, for, after all, she loved and was loved.

Nevertheless, her longing did not blind her to such a degree as to make her forget what she knew of her lover's character. Proud and pure as she knew him to be, how difficult it was to effect a reconciliation with him ! And, moreover, what means could she employ to be alone with him even for an hour ? Write ? She did so, not once, but ten times. Having sealed the letter she threw it into a drawer, and did not send it at all. At first no expression seemed to her sufficiently coaxing and humble, endearing and

tender. Then she was terrified with the apprehension lest Hubert should not even open the envelope, and should return it to her without a reply. Meet him again in society? She had a frightful dread of such an accident. With what courage could she endure his glance, which would be a cruel one, and one which she could not even attempt to disarm? Go to the Rue Vaneau and obtain an interview from him? She knew only too well that this was not possible. Send him a message? By whom? The only person to whom she had confided her love was her country friend whom she had employed to post her letters to her husband, while she herself was at Folkestone. Among all the men whom she met in society, that one who was sufficiently intimate with Hubert to act as a messenger in such an embassy was also he in whom her woman's instinct showed her the probable author of the indiscreet remarks which had ruined her—George Liauran. She was bound by the thousand tiny threads which society fastens to the limbs of its slaves.

At last, without any calculation, and by

obeying the impulses of her own heart, she succeeded in finding a means which appeared almost infallible to her for coming to an explanation. She experienced an irresistible longing to visit the little abode in the Avenue Friedland, and she told herself that Hubert would, sooner or later, feel this longing like herself. Of inevitable necessity she must meet him face to face on one of these visits. Under the influence of this idea she began to pay long solitary visits to those ground-floor rooms, whose every nook spoke to her of her lost happiness. The first time that she came there in this way, the hour which she spent among the furniture, was the occasion of such intolerable emotion that she was nearly relapsing into the extravagance of her first despair. She returned, nevertheless, and by degrees it became strangely sweet to her to accomplish this pilgrimage of love nearly every day. The doorkeeper lit the fire; she allowed the flame to illuminate the little drawing-room with a flickering light which struggled against the invasion of the twilight; she lay down upon the diwan,

to experience a sensation at once torturing and delicious, a blending of expectation, melancholy, and remembrance. Each time she was careful to first ask :

“ Has the gentleman been here ? ” and the negative reply would give her the hope that chance might cause the young man’s visit to coincide with her own.

She noticed, with beating heart, the slightest noise. All the objects around her which were not coloured by the blaze from the fireplace, were drowned in the shadow. The apartment was scented with the exhalations from the flowers, the cups and vases of which she used herself to trim, and she alternately dreaded and desired the entry of Hubert. Would he forgive her ? Would he repel her ? And finally she had to leave this refuge of her last hope, and she departed, her veil drawn down, her soul flooded by the same sadness that she used formerly to feel when Hubert’s kisses were still fresh on her lips, at once comforted and terrified by this thought :

“ When shall I see him again? Will it be to-morrow? ”

One afternoon when stretched thus upon the divan and absorbed in her dreams, she seemed to hear the turning of a key in the lock of the outer door. She sat up suddenly with a wild throbbing of heart. Yes, the door was opening and closing. A step sounded in the ante-room. A hand was opening the second door. She fell back again upon the cushions of the divan, unable to endure the approach of what she had so greatly hoped for, and thus finding, through her very sincerity, the vanquished attitude which the most refined coquetry would have chosen and which was calculated to work most powerfully upon her lover,—if it were he. But what other could come, and did she not immediately recognise his step? Yes, it was indeed Hubert who was just coming in.

Since their rupture, he, too, had often wished to come back to the little ground-floor rooms, where the clock had struck for him so many sweet hours,—the clock over which Theresa used grace-

fully to throw the black lace of her second veil "in order to veil the time better," she said. Then he had not ventured. Fond memories made him timid. People are afraid, in renewing such, both of feeling too much and of feeling too little. This afternoon, however, was it the influence of the gloomy winter sky and his own bewitching melancholy? Was it the reading yesterday of one of Theresa's most charming notes, dated a year back on the very same day?

Without thinking about it, Hubert had found himself on the way to the Avenue Friedland. To reach the latter he had mechanically pursued a network of winding streets, as he used to do in order to avoid spies. What need was there of such stratagems to-day? And the contrast had made his heart heavy. On his way he had to pass a telegraph office which formerly he used to enter after their meetings to prolong the voluptuousness of them by writing Theresa a note to surprise her just after she had reached home—a stifled echo, distant and so tender of the intoxicated sighs of that day! He saw the door

of the office, its dark colour, its inscription, the opening of the box reserved for telegraph cards, and he nearly fainted.

But he was already pursuing the pathway of the fatal Avenue, and he could see the house, the closed venetian blinds of the front rooms on the ground-floor, and the entrance commanded by the gateway. How did he feel when the door-keeper, after asking whether "the gentleman had had a good journey," added, in his hatefully obsequious tones: "The lady is there — ?"

He had not yet taken the key from his pocket when this news, less unexpected, perhaps, than he would acknowledge to himself, struck him like a full blow upon the breast. What was to be done? Dignity commanded him to depart immediately. But the lurking, deep desire which he had to see Theresa again suggested to him one of those sophisms, thanks to which we always find means to prefer with our reason what we most desire with our instinct.

"If I do not go in," he said to himself, looking towards the lodge, "this odious individual will

understand that we have quarrelled. He is capable of carrying his effrontery so far as to speak to Theresa of my interrupted visit. I owe it to her to spare her this humiliation, and besides, the matter of the rooms must be settled once for all. Shall I never be a man ? ”

It was at this moment, after the lightning flash of this sudden reasoning, that he opened the door, being aware the while that there was one in the adjoining room who was being thrown into agitation from feet to hair by this simple noise. He had often warmed those slender feet with many kisses, and so often handled that long black hair !

“ If she has come, it is because she loves me still.”

This thought moved him in spite of himself, and he was trembling as he passed into the drawing-room, where the dying of the twilight was striving with the flames on the hearth. He was surprised by the caressing aroma of the flowers standing in the vases on the mantel-shelf, with which was blended the odour of a

perfume that he knew too well. On the divan at the back of the room he saw the prostrate form of a body, then the movement of a bust, the paleness of a face, and he found himself face to face with Theresa, now sitting up and looking at him.

The silence of both was such that he could hear the sharp beats of his own heart and the breathing of the woman, who was evidently wild with emotion. The presence of his mistress had suddenly restored to him all his nervous anger. What he felt at this moment was that frightful longing to brutally ill-treat the woman, the being of stratagem and falsehood, which takes hold of the man, the being of strength and fierceness, whenever physical jealousy awakes the primitive male within him, placed opposite the female in the truth of nature. At a certain depth, all the differences of education and character are annihilated before the inevitable necessities of the laws of sex.

It was Theresa who first broke the silence. She understood too well the gravity of the ex-

planation which was about to ensue not to bring all her powers of feminine artifice into play. She loved Hubert at this moment as passionately as on the day when she confessed her inexplicable fault to him; but she was mistress of herself now, and could measure the scope of her words. Moreover, she had no play to act. It was enough for her to show herself just as she was, in the infinite humility of the most repentant tenderness, and it was in a nearly hoarse voice that she began to speak from the corner of the shadow in which she remained seated.

"I ask your forgiveness for being here," she said; "I am just going. When I allowed myself to come into this room sometimes, quite alone, I did not think that I was doing anything to displease you. It was the pilgrimage to that which has been the only happiness in my life; but I promise you that I will never do so again."

"It is for me to withdraw, madame," replied Hubert, who, at the sound of her voice, found himself disquieted by an emotion impossible of

definition. "She has come several times," he thought, and the notion irritated him, as happens when one is unwilling to give way to a tender feeling. "I acknowledge," he continued, in quite a loud voice, "that I did not expect to see you here again after what has taken place. It seemed to me that you would fly from certain memories rather than seek for them again."

"Do not speak harshly to me," she replied, still more softly. "But why should you speak to me otherwise?" she added, in a melancholy tone; "I cannot justify myself in your eyes. Yet reflect that had I not clung, as I did, to the beauty of the feeling which united us, I should not have been sincere with you as I was. Alas! it was because I loved you as I love you still, as I shall always love you."

"Do not employ the word 'love,'" returned Hubert; "you have no longer the right to do so."

"Ah!" she replied, with growing excitement; "you cannot prevent me from feeling. Yes, Hubert, I love you; and if I can no longer hope

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that my love is shared, it is none the less living here ;” and she struck her bosom. “ And you must know it,” she continued. “ My only comfort in the most utter unhappiness will be the thought that I have been able to tell you one last time what I have so often told you in happy days : I love you. Do not see in this a dream of forgiveness ; I shall not seek to move you, and you will never condemn me as much as I condemn myself. But it is none the less true that I love you more than ever.”

“ Well !” replied Hubert, “ this love will be the only vengeance that I wish to exact from you. Know then that you have caused this man whom you love to endure a martyrdom such as may scarcely be survived ; you have rent his heart, you have been his tormentor, the tormentor of every hour and every minute. There is nothing more within me but a wound, and it is you, you who have opened it. I have ceased to believe anything, hope for anything, love anything, and *you* are the cause. And this will last for a long time, a long time, and every morning

and every evening you will have to say to yourself: 'He whom I love is in his throes, and I am killing him.' "

And so he went on relieving his soul of the sorrow of so many days with all the cruel words with which his anger supplied him for the woman who was listening to him with downcast eyelids, disconcerted face, and frightful paleness, in the shadow wherein resounded the voice that was terrible in her ears. Was he not, merely by obeying his passion, inflicting upon her the most torturing of punishments, that of bleeding in her presence from a wound which she had dealt him and which she was unable to cure.

"Strike me," she replied simply, "I have deserved all."

"These are useless words," said Hubert, after a fresh silence, during which time he had been walking from one end of the room to the other to exhaust his passion, "Let us come to deeds. This interview must at least have a practical conclusion. We shall see each other again in society and at your house. Need I tell you that I shall

act as an honourable man, and that no one shall suspect anything of what has passed between us? There remains the matter of these rooms. I shall write to Emmanuel Deroy to let him know that I shall come here no more. It is useless for us to meet here again, is it not? We have nothing more to say to each other."

"You are right," said Theresa, in a crushed voice; then, as though forming a supreme resolution, she rose.

She passed both her hands across her eyes, and loosing from her wrist the bracelet to which the little key was suspended, she offered the trinket to Hubert without uttering a word. He took the gold chainlet, and his fingers met those of the young woman. They looked at each other, and for the first time since his entry into the room he saw her fully face to face. Her beauty at that moment was sublime. Her mouth was half open, as though respiration had failed her, her eyes were laden with languor, her fingers pressed those of the young man with a lingering caress, and a quick flame swept suddenly through him.

As though seized with intoxication he went up to her, took her in his arms, and gave her a kiss. She gave way, and both fell upon the shadowed divan together, clasping each other in one of those wild and silent embraces wherein dissolves all animosity, just or unjust, but all dignity as well. These are moments when neither man nor woman utters the words, "I love you," as though feeling that such frenzies have, in fact, nothing in common with love.

When they recovered their senses, she looked at him. She trembled lest she should see him yield to the horrible impulse which is familiar to men after similar lapses, and which prompts them to punish their accomplice for their own weakness by loading her with contempt. If Hubert was seized with a shudder of revolt, he, at least, had the generosity to spare Theresa the sight of it, and then, in a voice rendered so captivating by fear :

"Oh, Hubert!" she said, "I have you again for my own. Could you but know it, I should not have survived our separation. I should have died

of it, for I love you too much. I will be so kind, so kind to you, I will make you so happy. But do not leave me. If you love me no longer, let me love you. Take me, or send me away as your fancy wills. I am your slave, your thing, your property. Ah, if I could die now !”

And she covered her lover's wasted face with passionate tears. He nevertheless remained motionless, with lips and eyes closed, and thought of his downfall. Now that the intoxication was dispelled, he could compare what he had felt just then with what he had felt formerly. The symbol of the change that had been wrought was in the contrast between the brutality of the pleasure taken thus upon this divan, and the divine modesty of other days. He had not forgiven Theresa, and he had not been able to resist her, but for this very reason he had for ever lost the right of reproaching her with her betrayal.

And then, though he had had this right anew, how could he have used it? There was too strong a witchery in this woman's caresses. He foresaw that he would be subject to it from that day

forth, and that his dream was over. He had loved this woman with the sublimest love, and she now held him by what was darkest and least noble within him. Something was dead in his moral life which he would never find again. It was one of those wrecks of soul which are felt by those suffering them to be irremediable. He had ceased to value himself after ceasing to value his mistress. The eternal Delilah had once more accomplished her work, and, as the lips of the woman were quivering and caressing, he paid her back her kisses.

CHAPTER XII.

ABOUT a fortnight after this scene, Hubert had again begun to dine from home and to go out nearly every evening, to the great stupefaction of his mother, who, after being silent in the presence of a grief that she was powerless to control, now perceived in her son an air of intoxicated feverishness which frightened her. She could not forbear opening up her astonishment to George Liauran when the latter had come one evening, as was his wont, to take his place in that little drawing-room which had been the witness of so many of the poor woman's agonies.

The wind was blowing outside as on the night when General Scilly had commenced to think of his friends' unhappiness; and the old soldier, who was also present in his customary easy-chair, could not help observing the ravages which

some ten months past had wrought upon the two widows.

"I do not understand it at all," replied George to the questioning of his cousin; "Hubert and I have had no interview. It is certain that his despair is inexplicable if he did not believe in Madame de Sauve's guilt, and it is certain that he is again on the best of terms with her."

"Knowing what he does," said the Count, "he is not proud."

"What would you?" returned George, "he is like the rest."

Madame Liauran, lying on her couch, was holding Madame Castel's hand while her cousin uttered these words, the scope of which he did not realise. The fingers of mother and grandmother exchanged a pressure by which the two women told each other of the suffering of which neither could ever be cured. They had not brought up their child that he might become like the rest. They caught a glimpse of the inevitable metamorphosis which was on the eve of its accomplishment in Hubert just now.

Alas ! it is a profound truth that “ man is like his love ; ” but this love, why and whence does it come to us ? A question without reply, and, like woman’s treachery, like man’s weakness, like life itself, A CRUEL, CRUEL ENIGMA !

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